



Title: Loving Coalitions: Seven Texts on Feminist Resistance
Author(s): Loving Coalitions
Source: *Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies*, vol. III, no. 1
(Winter 2023), pp. 28-63
Published by: *Memorial University of Newfoundland*



Disclaimer

The views, opinions, conclusions, findings, and recommendations expressed in this publication are strictly those of the respective author(s) and are not necessarily the views of *Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies*, its editors, its editorial team, and Memorial University of Newfoundland (collectively, the “Publishers”). Authors are responsible for all content of their article(s) including accuracy of facts, statements, citations, and so on. The University gives no warranty and accepts no responsibility or liability for the accuracy or completeness of any information or materials contained herein. Under no circumstances will the Publishers, including Memorial University of Newfoundland, be held responsible or liable in any way for any claims, damages, losses, expenses, costs, or liabilities whatsoever resulting or arising directly or indirectly from any use of or inability to use the contents of this publication or from any reliance on any information or material contained herein.

Message from the Editors

The editors welcome letters on all subjects, especially if they discuss or comment on the works published in *Janus Unbound*. Please read our Guidelines for Authors prior to submitting your manuscript.



Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies is published by Memorial University of Newfoundland



*Janus Unbound: Journal
of Critical Studies*
E-ISSN: 2564-2154
3(1) 28-63
© Loving Coalitions,
2023

Loving Coalitions: Seven Texts on Feminist Resistance

Loving Coalitions

Introduction

In 2021, seven interdisciplinary gender studies scholars of mixed ethnic and racial origins, who have worked/still work in different gender studies centres in Sweden, formed a collective called *Loving Coalitions*. Our initial aim was to take as a point of departure our different yet intersecting everyday experiences of feeling epistemically, racially, and existentially Othered within Swedish gender studies and society, and start to work towards feminist coalition building. During these years we engaged with creative and artistic modes of knowledge production, such as automatic writing, collective memory-work, poetry, letters, and fiction.

In our *Loving Coalitions* we learnt that by creatively writing about and collectively discussing our experiences and memories of multiple challenging and, at times, impossible border crossings—national, epistemic, racialised, gender, legal, existential—we organically created a safe space in which we can compare notes between our different backgrounds and academic trajectories, and collectively understand and theorize about them in new transformative ways. We are also currently weaving together our discussions, letters, poems, memories, testimonies, and stories into a collective book publication that will celebrate the journey of a beautiful coalition of seven different yet interconnected feminist scholars: *Memories that Bridge: Weaving Feminist (Her)Stories in Loving Coalition*.¹

I. Gendered Violence

One of my most haunting dreams has been about women unknown to me killed by their partners. I saw them being murdered but without dying. They were, instead, lying on the floor, motionless, yet fully alive. I saw them staring back at the people who were watching them being murdered.

Every now and then, a new domestic violence victim's picture appears on the Greek news, as everywhere else in the world, I guess. We are all so familiar with this kind of picture: a smiley woman alone or hugging her kids, or among her

Loving Coalitions

friends, celebrating life oblivious to, or worse even, fully aware of how her life ends. A woman getting killed by her partner, is usually THE tragic piece of news in a normal day.

The public, pretentiously in shock!

Her neighbours, looking at the camera, are eagerly testifying: “Yes, we often listened to them fighting and screaming.”

The police, washing their hands. [Yes, the woman had called several times, but we couldn’t do much about it. There wasn’t sufficient evidence of abuse].

The court, is checking the economic and social status, as well as the ethnicity of both “parties:” the deceased and the killer.

And a few days later, the case is **forgotten**.

Only a bunch of feminist activists are still gathering outside of the court shouting for justice, asking for femicide to become a separate crime in Greece. Meanwhile, Greece is following the example of “progressive” European countries, in particular Sweden, by passing a new bill in 2021 aiming to “advance” the family law system by redefining the “best interests of the child,” and hence assumes the compulsory shared custody as the ideal scenario after divorce (Human Rights Watch 2021). How ironic and how painful when the law claims to be putting the child first while intentionally turning a blind eye to all the risks domestic/gendered violence victims would have to face even after divorce?

And The Walls of Dolls are getting taller... they are getting wider... (living) dead dolls hung on public walls for passengers to pass them by or stop by and look at them for an instance... for some to remember and for some to forget them...



Milan, Italy 2022 (©Maria Vlachou)

And the pairs of victims' shoes are ceaselessly proliferating...

Vahit Tuna was hosted by Kahve Dunyasi Contemporary Art Project “Yankose” to commemorate the 440 women killed by men in 2018 in Turkey. 440 pairs of black high-heels installed on Yankose’s building walls located in Kabatas, Beyoglu. These pairs represent the 440 women who have fallen victim to this social injustice. For Tuna, high-heels symbolize feminine power and the independence that these women never had.

I also wonder sometimes who gets to be recognized as a gendered violence victim. Does any pair of shoes belong to a (Black) trans/queer person?

...

But, but despite how much I hesitate, let me tell you about “him.”

Dear Loving Coalitions,

It's 21:47 my dearest co-travellers, and my body aches from the nasty flu my kids shared with me through their sweetest kisses. Today out of all days, I

feel more than ever the urge to write to you, to all of you. I need to connect with you. I can no longer wait. I want to go all the way down the rabbit hole and take you with me. I need you to understand; I feel it in my body, I feel it: YOU can understand. I feel you as the right companions in this process of re-opening my relatively healed wounds, because believe it or not, even wounds so deeply imprinted in one's body can heal. The very process of writing to you is healing.

He is her ex and biological father of her first child. She waited an awful amount of time before she kicked him out of her life, and even when she did, she found herself arguing against the 'assumed best interest of the child', while being Greek and while been residing in Sweden. She was still in Sweden, and the echo of all the legal ordeal hadn't faded away yet, when Greece started to follow the Swedish example passing the bill for compulsory shared custody. How tragically poetic!

Waiting to flee an abusive relationship. This was one of the hardest "waitings," my dear Tara and my dear Nina, that she had to endure in her life, and on top of that she felt like she had chosen it! Unlike your cases, waiting as migrant and waiting in cancerland, she wasn't officially stripped of control, and yet she felt unable to be set free. She had decided to wait and wait and wait. For what? For him to change? To understand? For a miracle to happen? Did she wait for someone else to notice what is happening? She often thinks: if she knew you all back then, would she had ever dared to say something to you?

The rabbit hole is deep and dark and often too surreal. It is also full of happiness and hope, and most certainly filled with all kinds of Loving Coalitions.

Should she let you peek in there? Shall the Pandora's Box be opened? Loving Coalitions isn't always a safe bet, it's actually more like a leap of faith. Loving Coalitions can feel like skydiving, hoping that the parachute will be kind enough to open and adequately strong to carry your weight until your body safely lands on the ground. There is no room to be naive; we cannot afford it. Loving Coalitions, in infinite plural, do not exist or occur in a vacuum; their members and the dynamics developed among them are not immune to the nastiness of the world. All forms and shapes of human stupidity, divisions, asymmetries, hierarchies, competition are all there, sneaking in every now and then as some sort of periodic reminders of our Loving Coalitions' fragility and need for constant care, as a parent or as a loyal friend who saves their last bit of energy for what they consider most precious.

There are sisters that I have known for years who wouldn't call themselves feminists or decolonial feminists; they have never written a book or participated in a protest. The world is full of these invisible feminists. They sense when to act fast, when to slow down, when to yell and when to keep quiet. Loving Coalitions also vary in length. I met so many familiar strangers, mostly women, who without any agreements, without any pre-signed intentions, stood there for only an instant or for timeless time breathing life into each other's lungs. There are sisters who didn't even get the chance to introduce themselves, there were more urgent matters we had to care for.

Loving Coalitions can last for time immemorial, my dearest Ina. They are like dreams.

Many of the ones I am referring to in this story could be considered inactive now, and yet still alive, immortal.

Have you spared some energy for her-story? I am writing her story, nonetheless this is a story for all these sisters who have gone through gendered violence or other forms of patriarchal/colonial violence. I guess speaking on behalf of way too many gendered violence survivors: we don't want anyone to feel sorry or pity.

I /Her/We only want to talk about it without any shame; to narrate it as it was, as it happened, as I/Her/We remember it and re-invent it while sharing it. My dear Loving Coalitions: without you and without the many other loving coalitions that I was lucky enough to be part of, for only an instant or for endless years, life wouldn't be worth living.

A poem for you

I will dance for you, my friends.

I will dance with you.

It's an improvised piece I created for you, with you, for us.

*For us all who have mastered the art of **waiting** one way or another, my dear Tara and Nina.*

*All of us who have cried and laughed at our **traumas** or **dramas**, as Nina says.*

*I will dance with you staring peacefully at the **many ends of the world** my dearest Madina. Once I felt I was right there, at the edge.*

At the edge, between life and death. He was holding my life in his hand, and I was letting him.

*But my **warm waters** had nurtured the most beautiful creature my eyes had ever seen, and thanks to it I survived, and I left him my dear Ina.*

I left him my dear Ina. I left.

*And here I am now, **having an idea for a book**, my sweetest Redi. An idea for a book thanks to you all, thanks to us, for us, for everyone who can relate to and feel with us.*

*For us who do not let our **time run out** my beautiful Victoria, because we know how to love.*

We know how to turn ugly words and ugly worlds into beautiful poems, into dance, into music, into the sea.

So, swim with me. Will you?

Join me in this underwater choreography of life and death.

There are beautiful magical sea creatures and scary sharks too.

Shall I hold your hands, so we feel less alone?

[Maria²]

2. A Rape of The Earth: Weaving Sámi Feminist Voices against Mines³

She says, the world as a whole comprises of an infinite set of relationships.

She says, the most essential thing in life is that everything circulates.

She says, whatever you do it will affect nature.

She says, the reindeer are the first priority.

She says, you should be able to transmit that knowledge to future generations.

She says, what happens with the land, the places, and the balance for the earth and everything else?

She says, they fracture our relational weave of connection.

She says, there are no boundaries regarding humankind's consumption and destruction of Mother Nature.

She says, it is total consumption.

She says, I have no trust in the Swedish state. They want to erase us from the map.

Seven Texts on Feminist Resistance

She says, our heritage is forced upon us by the state; all the threats, the exploitation, the worry.

She says, so many young Sámi suffer and have taken their own lives.

She says, as a mother, it makes you want to cry.

She says, we have a history of having been called a subhuman race, eternal children that don't know what is best for us.

She says, we are an Indigenous people. We have a completely different approach to land, to life.

She says, you must see a different life, different values.

She says, they make us, our legal orders, our histories, invisible.

She says, and so, the violence of emptying the land is being obscured.
She says, they are digging in us, and we die.

She says, we die with the land. That is what is happening.

She says, we die with the land.

She says, it is a rape of the earth, of us. Because we are all one with everything.

She says, it is a rape of the earth.

It is a rape of the earth.

[Ina]

3. Khutema Pear Tree⁴

When I told you that there were eight of us here, I was not mistaken. It is just that one of us is bodiless. Or rather he becomes embodied when he pleases, whereas most of the time he is present silently and immaterially, reminding us of his presence only through the rustling trees and the playing waves. They sense his presence and communicate with him in their language. He does not have a name, but I call him *Sozeris*.⁵ Sozeris becomes incarnated at the most crucial, critical moments that drastically change our life. I remember he emerged when air completely disappeared in order to teach us how to live without breathing. In the airplane and in the boat, he seemed to be just a strange

old man with long hair gathered into a grey, unkempt ponytail. How could we imagine that he... Well, let me start from the beginning.

Once upon a time a man lived in the North-West Caucasus. His name was *Gumzag*.⁶ He was not too young and not too old, kind but always sad as if some anxiety tortured him from within, or perhaps a premonition. He was not very tall, rather thin, and pale. And although Gumzag never played any sports there was something agile and swift in his posture and springy gait. He worked as an editor at the state publishing house. Several years ago, he graduated *cum laude* from the literary department of the local university. Books were his profession and his hobby as well. Gumzag spent most of his days making stories about everything and everybody he saw and remembered. Yet it never occurred to him to write them down.

Along with books he had his beloved grandmother *Goshfit*,⁷ who resolutely refused to move to the city and continued living in her tiny house in the foothills, surrounded by a wonderful garden. Gumzag also had a green-eyed wife *Nahata*,⁸ who was a pediatrician in a small sunny health center in the outskirts of their town, and a son whom they called *Aslan*,⁹ whose proud name did not match reality. Early on they found out that the boy suffered from a strange illness. Suddenly he would have a chills attack, started shivering and trembling in high fever, and his joints would become swollen and hurt. The next day he would seem fine, but very pale and weak. During these fits Aslan had visions – strange creatures with lions’ heads and deer bodies.

The doctors would say: “Remittent fever, a typical Caucasian disease,” and made those helpless gestures. “Perhaps he will outgrow it one day.” Goshfit was convinced that the boy was bewitched by the neighbors and secretly took Aslan to a local healer. But nothing helped. The lad wasted away and missed more and more classes, especially in the spring and in the fall. With a long sigh, the grandmother would say: the branch ducts are destroyed, the roads are built in the wrong places, the forests are cut down, the rivers are given new beds. No wonder the swamps are coming on and our bodies are soaking up all this rot and dampness. We never had anyone in our family suffering from malaria until the war with Russia started. And it has been going on for three hundred years, maybe more.

Gumzag’s life could have easily continued in their small one-bedroom flat in the outskirts of their city, but we never know what is awaiting us. One day he came to work and encountered a huge padlock hanging on the editorial house door. He started making calls to his bosses, all in vain – they disappeared with no trace. Thus, he became instantly unemployed. If it were not for Nahata who started working two shifts per day, and grandmother Goshfit’s regular tasty presents, they would hardly be able to survive. Gumzag tried to find a job, but

Seven Texts on Feminist Resistance

he was not used to physical labor and his education proved completely useless. The only job he was offered as a *cum laude* graduate of the local Germanic-Romance languages and literatures department was at a taxi company as an English-speaking operator. Foreigners called them to place an order, and someone was needed to talk to them. Gumzag could not even get a position at a public school because there were fewer and fewer schools, and one could only get a job there through good connections.

He became reticent and even less talkative than before. Gumzag would often stay home with his sick son because his wife was always at work. Once at the very end of the fall, when days rapidly shorten and the chilling damp penetrates to the bone, early in the morning he went down to pick up the mail from their box on the ground floor of a shabby concrete apartment complex and discovered a corn-colored envelope with a short letter printed on the stamped paper.

Dear Mr. Gumzag,

It is our great pleasure to offer you a job as the General Island Manager at Flotsam and Jetsam. You are expected to keep the island in order, regularly tidy up, and keep an eye on the spiritual and mental state of its seven inhabitants. Your lodging and board are provided for free and the monthly salary of 1000 US\$ will be deposited in any bank account you provide. We regret to say that we are unable to cover your ticket.

Looking forward to your positive answer!

Sincerely yours,

The Honorable Flotsam and Jetsam (former) Trade Company

Holy cow, *The Little Prince* and the New Age in one bottle! – thought Gumzag to himself. I am required to clean the volcano, water the rose, and conduct spiritual conversations with the inhabitants of the island. Why not? That way we would be able to pay Aslan's medical bills. And he sat down immediately to write the answer.

I will find a way to get the tickets. I will get a bank loan.

Next morning a small envelope with his answer was stamped and placed into the international bag by Gumzag's former classmate Sulieta who had worked at the local post office. He sighed with relief and stepped outside, into the sunny street, where he immediately fainted.

- Lift his head higher!

- Get him some water!

Loving Coalitions

- Such an effeminate generation, a grown-up guy, and faints like a young girl.

Embarrassed, barely recovered, and with trembling legs Gumzag went home where he was met by a cheerful Aslan whose fever suddenly disappeared.

Dad, will you teach me how to skate? The winter is coming soon, no?

Fighting vertigo Gumzag climbed to the entresol cabinet to look for his old hockey skates. When he reached for a black plastic bag in the far corner, a sudden sharp pain pierced his shoulder and he clearly remembered that many years ago this very shoulder was injured by a Tatar spear during close combat.

Am I going mad? What spear? What combat? I have never even served in the army. But the shoulder hurt and did not allow him to even raise his arm and reach for the plastic bag. Finally, Gumzag managed to stretch far enough to pick up the bundle. However, he did not find the skates inside. Instead, it contained some wooden object wrapped in an old fabric.

But of course, it was a branch of *khutema*! And the fabric was a sail! The thought came to Gumzag so clearly as if he read it in an invisible book. How do I know this? Why do I remember this name?

The pear tree branch was huge, old, and corny, yet it did not turn into ashes when he brought it into the daylight. Having forgotten about the skates, Gumzag carefully took khutema out and, for some reason, brought it into the bathroom where he thoroughly wiped it with a rag and then, after a while, carefully placed the branch on top of the piano.

How did khutema end up in his flat and in such an inappropriate place? When he was a small child grandmother Goshfit used to take the branch out, in the darkest December days, wash it like a respected departed and adorn its horned knotty end with a head of the home-made smoked cheese that she carefully prepared before. He was not interested in any of this then. He was looking forward to the New Year discotheque organized at his school and to different presents that he was to receive from his parents and relatives, to the tangerine aroma in the house and the light holiday frost, promising a hockey game with the guys from the neighboring street and quiet forest walks. He was not listening to Goshfit's words, when she took khutema branch to the yard and decorated it with homemade candles and then asked their neighbor Aishat, who recently got married, to light them up.

His parents always gave him separate presents. But it was never what he wanted. His mother usually gave him books and his father brought him East-German building kits whose multiple small details shamelessly mixed and soon

Seven Texts on Feminist Resistance

it was impossible to assemble a tank or a red convertible. Frankly, Gumzag was never into that anyway. But he gradually learned to like his mom's books about adventures in far-away countries. Soon he could understand English better than his native language. But could he even call it a native language if he knew only a few words? Early orphaned Gumzag was tormented by the fact that he was unable to speak with his grandmother heart to heart, that they could exchange only the simplest everyday phrases. It is true, though, that she understood him with no words, and it was enough for him to see the boundless love in her eyes.

It was his grandmother who named him Gumzag. She looked into the gray eyes of the newly born baby that did not recognize anyone yet, and quietly said: "Well, there you are, Gumzag, the restless heart!"

It is not a real name, it is a nickname, condescendingly claimed his father whose own name was Anatoly Kambulatovich.¹⁰ He taught physics at a local vocational school.

- Anatoly, leave my mother alone. She knows better.

- Of course, now you will start telling me that my mother-in-law is a witch, well, a healer!

Indeed, she remembered what others forgot and what was not supposed to be remembered. She also had a nickname, but hers was worth a million real names. Goshfit means freedom-loving. And she truly was. The grandfather died early, he had not even lived until Stalin's death, and Goshfit was left alone with her small daughter. She had no kin. Everyone died in wars, repressions, famine, and hardship. There was no one to help her and she would not accept any help from the strangers. Goshfit knitted and sewed so that her golden girl, *Simaž*,¹¹ had no need for anything.

But the main thing that allowed them to survive was the beautiful garden with the most amazing trees planted by the grandfather. These are our hybrids, Goshfit used to say with affection. She would caress the trunks with her overworked hands. Look, daughter, this tree had an apple as her father and a pear as her mother. But summers are becoming more and more rainy, and winters are colder these days. So, the harvests are meager, not as good as before. It is all because of the forests, they should not have been cut down. The forest is our home. And the forest garden is a man-made paradise on earth. For the grandmother Allah was much less important than *Tkba*,¹² who created the whole world, or even the patron of the fruit gardens, *Khyateguasha*,¹³ or the god of fertility *Sozeris*.

Goshfit could not explain to Gumzag that their family had been keepers: maintaining the links with Sozeris for several centuries. They took care of the khutema branch, taking it out only once a year on the shortest day of the winter. They remembered the songs and the prayers glorifying the god of winds and waves. They were visited by the travelers before the long road, especially by the sailors. They were asked to give a blessing by the local farmers. Neither Christianity nor Islam or the Soviet godless faith were able to change this. But there was no one left to pass on this knowledge to.

Goshfit's daughter Simaz was not in the least interested in gardening or sailing. She became an English teacher in a local school. Then trouble got her acquainted with this Anatoly and he took her to the city, away from her mother and from the garden that made her feel so safe. But she realized it when it was too late. Then Gumzag was born and seven years later his parents decided to get a divorce. The father went to build the Baikal-Amur Mainline. And the son had neither seen nor heard anything about him afterwards. He did not even know if the father was still alive. On a wet early Spring day in 1985, when the tenth grader Gumzag was preparing his homework half listening to yet another endless "Swan's Lake" broadcast,¹⁴ a humpback minibus that carried Simaz along the slippery road from her school to their sooty neighborhood, crashed with a big truck. That is how the grandmother and the grandson were left alone. All of this came at once in front of his eyes when Gumzag's hand touched the knotty khutema branch. It was the beginning of his new life.

Soon they went to the park together with Aslan. Well, it was not quite a park to be precise, rather it was a former forest garden. Each time he got here Gumzag was in awe. No one had ever told him about it before but somehow, he knew what kind of trees these were. Moreover, he did not know their Latin or Russian names, but bits and pieces of some old names in an unknown language that turned out to be his native one. But no, how could he possibly know this? When he was a teenager, the grandmother could no longer walk to the far away forest and was unable to show him all the trees. Yet, somehow the words as such were not that important after all. He just knew without words what was this or that tree and all of them seemed familiar and dear. He was particularly attracted by the boxwood tree, which once grew here since time immemorial. Boxwood forests were quickly destroyed by the Russian army and the subsequent influx of various colonists – the Cossacks, the Greeks, the Germans, the Ukrainians, the Moldovans, the Czechs. They were getting sick, and they were starving in this unknown place and wanted to sell the valuable wood as soon as possible: cut down the fruit trees to eat the fruit to survive, without thinking of the future. And yet a few boxwood trees were left around. Gumzag was now hugging and stroking one of them, no less than five hundred years old. Goshfit still had lots of boxwood boxes and other housewares, made more than a century ago. She explained to Gumzag at one point that boxwood is a stubborn

Seven Texts on Feminist Resistance

tree, full of contradictions. It is poisonous but it cleans and disinfects the air very well. And the boxwood forest is the best place for asthmatic and pulmonary patients. One more thing – you cannot make a boat out of the heavy and dense boxwood – it will definitely sink. So Gumzag’s boat had to be a light willow *camara*.¹⁵ But first things first.

- Look, this is loquat, the forest jam. Try it! He would say, offering Aslan a brown fruit. And this is a wild dogwood fruit. And this is cherry plum.

At some point they noticed a small path right behind the dogwood tree, a path which Gumzag did not remember at all. They took it without saying a word. Soon the father and the son found themselves not at some busy street as they expected but in the middle of an old half-destroyed road. It used to be covered with clay before and traces of this red clay were still visible here and there. Along both sides one could see the ruined drains and even a clogged well. Where the road ran too close to the abyss, someone had carefully placed the enormous boulders defending the travelers from falling down. Now they were covered in moss and almost merged with the surrounding landscape. In about a hundred meters they came across a wooden bridge over a dried river. It was rickety and rotten and Gumzag decided that he needed to come back and fix it, so that passers-by would not be afraid of falling into the ravine. He also decided to clean the drains and the well.

This is what he started doing. Aslan eagerly helped his father, as he felt much better that fall. A month after his strange fainting, Gumzag received a contract from Flotsam and Jetsam and tried to get a bank loan to buy tickets for a flight operated by the only air company that flew to that island. It had a strange name: Jimmy Jimmereeno Air. But since he was unemployed, no bank agreed to give him a loan.

Gumzag did not say anything to Nahata about the invitation to the island of the life racks. Busy with her work, she did not at first notice the changes in her husband’s appearance and behavior. Only Aslan was aware of his father’s strange metamorphoses.

When Gumzag was gone all day fixing the road, his wife would complain.

- You are never here, and I am left to do everything myself, it is hard for me, don’t you understand?

Gumzag did not answer. He suffered from insomnia, tossed and turned, fell into disturbed sleep with colorful dreams that soon completely replaced his dull reality – the dusty concrete five-storied buildings, the artificial leather factory

Loving Coalitions

that released its chemical excrement into the atmosphere of their district, the stale air.

In his dreams, a strong and fresh sea breeze was blowing in his face and his arms were automatically making rowing movements, so that he moved to sleep on the sofa so as not to wake up Nahata. The non-existent wound in his shoulder ached when the weather was changing and did not let him sleep. But if he did fall asleep, then it was very hard to wake him up. His skin became dark from working in the open air, he stopped shaving and cutting his hair so that soon he was overgrown with a silver, almost white, curly mane that he kept in a ponytail.

- Yeti, you look like a Yeti! Complained Nahata. You'd better find a job. Even that taxi company is better than nothing!

It started snowing in mid-November. The road was fixed and Gumzag felt he accomplished something important that he had to manage before leaving. In the evening he took out the old sail and decided to wash it.

- Is this your new project? Nahata asked ironically. Have you decided to become a yachtsman? You do not even know how to swim.

He did not say anything. He would not be able to explain to his wife why, in his dreams, he would swim as a dolphin, and it seemed to him that water was his element. When his hand stroked the old sail, he could feel the rumbling waves and the breath of the wind.

That same evening Aslan suddenly told his father: Hey, Dad, why don't we build a boat?

And then Gumzag put it all together. But of course, a boat! Then I will not need a loan or a ticket. I will get to the island by boat as my ancestors used to do.

- You damned Thor Heyerdahl! said Nahata. Where are you going to sail? This way is Turkey, and that way is Ukraine. And who would row at your camara?

Gumzag calmly walked into the barn and hammered until late at night. In several weeks the gentle hands of a typical bookworm had lost their clumsiness and the work went much faster. God knows how he knew how to build this light flat bottom sailing and rowing vessel. He discovered its image from an old lithography "Circassian Pirates," that Gumzag found in one of the editorial files. It was left on his huge desk at home as a reminder of his previous life. The file contained illustrations for a never materialized project of a local ama-

Seven Texts on Feminist Resistance

teur historian. Luckily Gumzag found a very detailed draft of an unusual Adyghean camara with a curved and elevated stern and a wide framework. Its fore was decorated with a mountain bull's head. The most difficult task for Gumzag was to assemble a removable roof, which was supposed to protect him during storms, and a small mast for the sail. But then Aslan started helping him again. By the summer a light boat was almost ready, and they managed to drag it to the river together.

By that time Gumzag had completely changed. His muscles were filled with strength, his long hair had become starkly white. His darkened skin had wrinkled. Yet inside him a relentless fire went on, and this inexorable sparkle made him work tirelessly. He seemed to be not old but rather eternal. Once he told his son that he remembers the things that never happened to him, remembers so vividly and so palpably that it is sometimes hard for him to cope with the flow of memories of his different selves. The boy did not answer. He only looked at his father with anxiety and sadness. Then he asked:

- When your boat is ready, will you take off and go away?

Another strange thing was that he completely stopped needing any food, as if his body was receiving energy from a different source. Not wanting to scare his family, Gumzag pretended to eat with them.

In his dreams he was a many-faced rower and merchant, at times a pirate and a warrior. He understood Farsi and Arabic, Turkic, and even Greek and Italian a bit, never forgetting his ancient mother tongue because he easily changed seas and countries, rivers, and markets, but never failed to pray to his patron Sozeris each time he was setting to sail – asking him to bless the boat and the harvest.

In his earthbound dreams a fresh wind was driving him along the valley towards the far away mountains. He would ride fast astride a light brown *Kabarda*¹⁶ horse. The dream would always end at the beautiful meadow with a large pear tree in the middle. Gradually he learned how to control his dreams and if he wanted to take a closer look at something he would push off the ground and fly up so easily, silently hovering as a bird or a soul liberated of its earthly burden.

Late in the spring, when the boat was almost ready, Gumzag found that very meadow. It was hidden in a lesser-known canyon, and one could get there by climbing a steep cliff. The canyon remained untouched by any of the modernizing fits – Russian, Soviet, or the current national. It lacked the meaningless highway cutting through the mountains. And so, the climbers who were still training at the local camp – now almost at the border with Georgia, reached the plateau by means of an old platform lifter for cars or just climbing a falling

Loving Coalitions

apart staircase on the side. Once on top you were rewarded with an eye-catching view – a magic mountain and very close to it, a beautiful glade with an old pear tree. Gumzag grafted it with the best bergamot from his grandmother’s garden.

A year passed. Having turned into a white-haired yet cheerful old man, he was long gone sailing into uncertainty, and the tree gave its fruit. Gumzag was not destined to try them. The pears turned out to be brown and tart like the wild ones, yet fragrant and rather sweet like bergamot. The fruit were tasted by his son who remembered how to find his father’s pear tree. Before leaving Gumzag took Aslan to the treasured glade. They asked a local shepherd to give them a lift, but the old car broke down and they had to walk. Soon Aslan got tired, but he did not say anything and continued stoically to follow his father on the narrow staircase. Finally, they climbed over the pass and the boy could admire the wonderful and magic khutema tree.

Gumzag disappeared on a July morning, having left a short note with an account number and a promise to send money every month. He was sailing along the seasonally full river towards the sea. He carried only some drinking water and the pear tree branch, together with a few grafts of his grandmother’s best fruit trees. Hence today we have a hybrid of *deilekuzh* plum and a local wild apricot, a mix of the Adyghean apple *Aguemi* and a wild pear, Circassian hazelnut and an unknown kind of nut growing on Flotsam and Jetsam.

Now that I think of it, I realize that although Gumzag’s camara was light and manoeuvrable, it could never possibly reach our island. Yet one can get to Flotsam and Jetsam in different ways. When our boat wrecked, I thought that a strange old man vanished in the sea together with others. But soon he reemerged. *Sozeris* cannot drown after all. Water is his element. He is its patron. Looking at other future inhabitants of the island desperately struggling for their lives in the storm, Gumzag remained indifferent. He knew exactly who will survive and who will become a sacrifice to *Sozeris*. Could it be that the ancestral memory that his grandmother Goshfit was lamenting, has survived after all, even if not at home, even if not in the material world, but rather in this strange place between life and death, where the body of a modest editor has sheltered the god of wings, sailors, and adventures?

[Madina]

4. My Feminism

It began with absence and desire

It began with wanting and “disidentification” (Muñoz 1999)

It began with demanding more than the little crumbs patriarchy had thrown at us in the name

Seven Texts on Feminist Resistance

of gender

Wanting to feel the breeze in my hair when walking down the street on an autumn day
To be acknowledged a full person as was my younger brother
Yes! It began with simple things, emotions, and mere disobedience
Dismissed by the adults as the puberty crisis
This everyday thing without a name or definition
A warm surge of emotion when I read Oriana Fallaci's books,
Or novels with a strong female character,
Yet not knowing why this surge of emotions, not yet!

It began with the struggle of taking space where space was shrunken,
So tight that you had to break bones, shed skin and tears to rip it open
At home, out in the streets, at work, family gatherings
It began with absence and desire, wanting, and disidentification
Yet slowly dragged itself to connect and weave this famishing disobedience
Weaving itself to other lustful incarnations as we sat down together
in each other's bedrooms, cafes, or up in the mountain
Sharing our "unreasonable" thoughts, "forbidden" desires,
Giggling with a sense of pride at what an awful bunch of daughters we were
Shamelessly embracing the shame where no one could hear us but us only

It did not have a name then, just an abrupt desperation itching to release itself into action
As together, we practiced resistance in the margins of a collapsing society
Imploding in on itself after a revolution, war, and ideological dissolution
As communism, patriarchal patriotism, visions of democracy or freedom
vaporized into thin air
Only to rain back on us in forms of religious fundamentalism, economic collapse, corruption, and
stark class differentiation,
This abrupt urgent wanting that was stretched to incorporate gender, class struggle, and religion
We did not have a name for it then, not yet.
It was just a way of life, a continuous intersectional rearticulation of us, our identity, our
fates, our place in this crashing social configuration

The name came later, dispatched as an insult and an accusation
As we were told we are feminists to which we responded
"We are not feminists but ... "
Without us or them knowing the concept and its various formulations
It took us a while to realize that the concept is a different way of phrasing what we were
living

Loving Coalitions

though somewhat different,
maybe it was the historical situatedness of our struggle
In a land that was one of many Cold war's battlefields between the US and the Soviet Union
Maybe a long history of Islam in the region merged with our many cultures
Maybe, multiple ethnicities, religious belongings, and languages
I cannot put my finger on it but something was different, yet so strangely same, related
We decided to claim it as it was, a way of thinking about our gender struggles
simultaneously diverse and similar across physical and symbolic borders
Saying it proudly, we claimed us as feminists!

Struggling to take space had turned me into a loud bitch in my feminist exertion
I came to learn about it eventually, hoping to unlearn it
I learned from the evening chitchats in our feminist collective,
or daily conversation with the PhD cohorts, colleagues and mentors
I learned as I ploughed through the writings of many feminists
That there are multiple ways to be a feminist,
That I need to exercise patience, silence, and self-reflection
to figure out who I am anew, not as a response to what is thrown at me
But on my own accounts even if it takes ages
to calm my hurt, to learn to analyse my experiences,
To forgive?
To practice the art of listening, one that I am still struggling with
Reminding myself continuously that I do not have to be loud all the time
To shut up, to listen, to share space, to practice collaboration
Feminism is a constant rearticulation of one's self, the world one inhabits, relations one
forges, habits one unlearns

It is an everyday way of living in struggle with others
A never-ending struggle, a constant state of learning
Always in motion, continuous transformation into new ways of being a feminist,
Forging new modes of alliances, breaking through new glass ceilings,
Letting oneself be a loud bitch at times but also to shut up and listen
Learning to love, learning to inhabit one's self even if one makes mistakes,
Learning to apologize and to be accountable,
To hope, to hopefully form loving coalitions

[Tara]

5. What If Every Critter's Death Was Vibrant?¹⁷

1.

What if every critter's death was vibrant?
Uncommon, special and unique?
Anthropocene necropowers
would just crumble,
orchestrated mass-extinction
finally become undone!
Not a number in statistics,
not a "Count the casualties"
of the common one-world mass-death.
But ecstatic vibrant endings
in the midst of the non/living
vital dance of zoe's forces:
decomposing and becoming,
planetary waxing-waning,
waxing-waning,
endlessly.

2.

God in heaven?
Just forget Him!
Immortality
is fake news,
human hubris,
always was.
It's another way
of executing
a "Divide and conquer",
through a techno-fixed,
extended
life support,
reserved for
carefully selected souls,
digitally memorized,
while
their flesh is stored
in freezers.

Loving Coalitions

Cryo-preservation
for eternity!
Hip hurrah
Hallelujah.

3.

What if every critter's death was vibrant?
Ahuman,¹⁸ rhizomatic ecstasy,
vital love-death,
Orpheus' pain
transformed to music,
and to lushly growing trees.
Coatlucue with her necklace
full of human hearts and skulls,
and her children,
Coyolxauhqui,
Eurydice,
Orpheus,
snakes and ants and stones and peat bogs,
rats and lichen,
slugs and mountains,
cats and humans,
dust and rivers,
ghosts and spirits,
moons and algae,
cosmic black holes,
vira, cancers and bacteria,
planetary pains and pleasures.
Tricksters everywhere,
dancing to the underworld
crossing thresholds and shapeshifting,
dwelling in a zombie mode
resting, resting,
– and returning in the spring.

4.

You, my love,
enjoy the dancing,
always did,

Seven Texts on Feminist Resistance

and always will.
You were
queer and trans avant la lettre,
feminist, postsocialist.
Decolonial issues dawned on you
when you, aged 16,
reading about
socialism in Iran
and the government of Mosaddegh,
overthrown in 1953,
by a coup d'état,
orchestrated by the CIA.
Later, Danish women
travelling to the UK and Poland
for abortions,
concerned you deeply,
until women's reproductive freedom
from paternalistic powers
finally was legalized,
in Denmark, 1973.
Tiny little ants
in a hut in Corsica
attracted your attention
with their alien rhizomatic actions
moving back and forth to minute food spots,
while you also noticed how John Lilly's dolphins
in the books we read
while writing "Cosmodolphins"¹⁹
with their clever observations
totally dismantled
how the scientists,
although in power,
most of all did stupid tricks,
letting many dolphins die
in their lab experiments
due to lack of understanding
of the fact that dolphins
cannot be anaesthetized.
What if every critter's death was vibrant?

Loving Coalitions

5.

Algae slowly built the seabed,
while the water still was warm,
and volcanoes sometimes
interfered with gouts of ashes.

Dying plants
produced the dust.

Later ice rolled in
and, with mighty geopowers,
caused the cliffs to rise
up from the ground,
while the sea
carved out the caves.

Immanence

and

spirit

matter,

let's quickly join the dance,

just embrace it

not resist it,

this is not a dance macabre,

this is

planetary

holobiont,

multispecies,

sympoietic,

symanimagenic

geo-tango,

vibrant life

in vibrant death,

vibrant death

in vibrant life.

What if every critter's death was vibrant?

[Nina]

6. Resisting the coloniality of power at a Swedish workplace²⁰

I began my career as a school counsellor after completing my master's degree in social work and worked at a School for Adult Education. I was young and proud to have finally achieved my goal of being permanently employed. There were three of us counsellors at the school, and our offices were next to each other. My room was in the middle of the offices. The other two counsellors were older white Swedish women. Most of the students had a foreign background and were around my age. By attending the school, students were able to validate their foreign education, learn Swedish as a second language, and upgrade their Swedish high school diplomas. In addition to being the only Black person employed at the school, I anticipated some challenges as a young counsellor. The first challenge came from an unexpected source; a Black male student who had previously sought my advice regarding his academic career. I was in my office one day when he came in carrying a bouquet of flowers and asked me to go out to dinner with him. The situation caught me by surprise, and I immediately recognized the need to set a firm and clear boundary. In response, I explained that I was at work, and that if he did not require my support as a school counsellor, he should leave my office, and take his flowers with him. As he stood on the other side of the desk, I sat on my chair waiting for him to leave the room. Suddenly, he started screaming at me and pointing at me, telling me to get off my "high horses and act like a woman" as he stood over me. He was very angry. In response, I stood up from my chair, passed by him, opened the door, and asked him to leave.

The encounter with the white Swedish school counsellors

Immediately following the confrontation with the Black male student, I was shaken and went to inform and seek support from my colleagues. While I was shaking and crying, I told my counsellor colleagues that I thought he was going to strike me. In response, one of the counsellors asked: "How long has he visited you?" This question surprised me so much that I stopped crying, but I did not hesitate to respond: "It was his second visit to my office, but he had never brought flowers, gifts, or asked me out for a dinner date." One of the counsellors folded her arms when she looked at me, and I began to feel uncomfortable; this was not the support I had anticipated. I didn't have time to gather myself, before I heard one of the counsellors exclaim: "But Doreen, you should not encourage such behavior!" I was unable to believe my ears; my mouth was on the floor. Could she possibly be insinuating what I thought she was saying? I had barely recovered from the insult when the other counsellor continued to speak: "It was a long time ago we had such problems." Both giggled as they looked at each other. Annika, the one with the folded arms stated: "You make us feel like old maids." I responded in a dry cold voice: "Perhaps you are." Annika became so angry because of that comment that she broke the pencil in her

hand and threw it on the floor while yelling: “But Doreen!!!” At that point, I was furious, annoyed, and frustrated by the way I was treated. Instead of receiving support, I was being accused. Didn’t I already have enough headaches to deal with for today? I thought to myself. The lack of support from my colleagues added salt to injury. It was obvious to me that they were envious of me. They disliked that the students preferred to come to me, especially during “open hours.” During these hours, we would have our office doors open inviting students to drop in; however, the students would still queue in front of my room. The students’ actions were understandable since they identified with me and knew that I could assist them in navigating the system, otherwise I would not be working as a counsellor at the school.

I left the room, and headed back to my office, when I heard someone walking behind me, and I recognized Annika by the sound of her heels. I hurried to my room and closed the door. I had barely entered, when the door was flung wide open, and Annika, stood right in front of me. Her eyes were fixed on me as I stared at her. She squinched her eyes together, barely visible behind her glasses. I sensed her sharp stare, as if she was ready to confront me. What does she want now? I thought to myself. It was puzzling why she was in my room with such a nasty attitude. With her eyes still fixed on me, she took a few steps toward me, indicating her presence as she spoke slowly in a lowered voice: “What would you say if I called you a “Damn N*gger?” My jaw dropped, and I wondered whether this woman had gone insane. Did she just call me the N-word? As I stood there in a state of shock and astonishment, I replied: “What do you mean?.” Taking a step closer to me, she responded to her own question by saying: “Damn N*gger !!!” Suddenly, time stood still. I could see her eyes flashing behind her glasses, radiating hate and disdain in a way I had never witnessed before. As I found myself in a state of shock, unable to breathe, her disgusting words tiring me from the inside, there was nothing I could do but to run away from this horrific scene.

The encounter with the head principal and the school board

I rushed to the principal’s office with tears in my eyes, and my heart pounding. Before she could even turn around to see who was there, I rushed into her office and the words flew out of my mouth: “She called me the N-word! The counsellor Annika! Help!” The principal was an older white woman, close to retirement age, who enjoyed smoking cigarettes with her perfectly manicured red nails. Standing behind her desk, her face was empathetic as she listened patiently as I explained what had happened that upset me. With a voice of concern, she tilted her head to the side and exclaimed: “But, how is that possible? Annika knows that we have a ‘Diversity Plan’ at the school. What did you do to make her say that?”

Seven Texts on Feminist Resistance

She obviously didn't understand the gravity of the situation. Annika called me the N-word in my office. She was a racist. How hard was it to understand? The principal's shifting of the blame onto me and not reacting to Annika's racism was appalling to me. I felt violated and wanted the principal to take responsibility. I told her that she must arrange a meeting immediately so that we could find a solution to this terrible situation. Reluctantly she agreed, and a meeting was set the following day with the members of the school board.

I remember walking into the meeting room, which had a huge mahogany table. My two counsellor colleagues were already seated, and so were the two assistant principals, a male and female. I sat on one short side of the table, with the head principal sitting across from me on the other short side of the table. We looked at each other, and I could see that the two assistant principals were sitting on her left side, while one of the counsellors, was sitting on her right side. Annika was sitting closest to me on my left side. The principal asked me to start retelling what had happened. While I was speaking, I could sense Annika's eyes and breath burning through my left cheek. I was not going to be intimidated by her, and I proceeded to tell my story. I started by saying: "She called me a damn N-word." Before I even got the next words out of my mouth, Annika said loudly and clearly: "No, I didn't call you a damn N- word ... I said DAMN N * GGER!!" Having emphasized that last word so passionately, the entire room was filled with filth from her mouth. She stared me down as if we were on a battlefield about to pull out our revolvers. Although her words punched me in the gut, I was relieved that she admitted her crime, as she was openly acting out her racism. As I glanced around the table for my colleagues' reactions, I was met with silence. Their eyes were fixed on the table, as they sat there silently. I observed my other counsellor colleague frantically scribbling down notes, but she, too, refused to look at me.

After the racist outburst sucked the air out of the room, the head principal announced that the meeting was over and mumbled something about rescheduling another meeting. They all stood up synchronously, pushed in their chairs, took their papers, and left the room. I knew after that meeting that they were all in agreement that protecting Annika's racism was more important than protecting me from racial harassment and abuse.

From this point forward, the two counsellors began a campaign of harassment and exclusion against me. Being only a part-time employee, I was dependent upon my colleagues for information regarding important on-going issues at the school.

One day, I arrived at work and found that they were in the middle of a meeting, and when I asked what was going on, they told me to leave, and continued their meeting as if I did not exist. Other times, I found important documents and

papers that had been forgotten by the printer, along with important discussions, in which I was not included in the emailing list. At the end of the day, the racist harassment, exclusion, and abuse had become so severe that I couldn't endure it any longer. So, I took some time off, but I never returned to my first permanent job in Sweden.

Racist coloniality of power and epistemic disobedience

Inhabiting a Black female body in a white normative society such as Sweden (Kalonaitye et al. 2008, 3-4) heightens the intensification of one's bodily consciousness, as one's orientation in the world, and how the Black body occupies white space (Puwar 2004). Thus, Whiteness makes orientation a central theme and shapes the way bodies are situated in space (Ahmed 2007, 149). Resistance to and surviving in a dehumanizing modern/colonial matrix of power (Mignolo 2011a; Tlostanova and Mignolo 2009) is a constant struggle for Black bodies in a world where one's body can be snatched up, torn apart, and thrown back in pieces and bits, unrecognizable to oneself (Fanon 1952).

I gradually became aware of the emergence of a racist whiteness through the microaggressions directed at me. Furthermore, they presented themselves as victims of my alleged ageism, negating race and sexism from the situation. "*You make us feel like old maids*" can be understood as an expression and manifestation of the fragility of white femininity (DiAngelo 2018). I was constructed as nothing more than an unskilled worker who had been put in her place after they had rubbed their pettiness into my face and stripped me of any sense of professionalism.

They believed that "civilizing the immoral savage" would be as straightforward as it sounded, but enacting the oppressive and condemnatory logic of coloniality and instituting racialized discipline is a complex process because it also creates a space that energizes the oppressed and condemned other to resist through a form of delinking from the logic of coloniality through "epistemic disobedience" (Mignolo 2011b).

As a result, a furious anger was ignited in me, depriving them of the opportunity to enjoy their constructed joke about ageism at my expense. It was at this point that my epistemic disobedience took over and I disengaged from their giggles and laughter at my expense. My enactment of resistance struck a sore spot when I did not dispute that they called themselves "old maids," but rather confirmed what they said. Immediately, the racialized drama escalated. With the dramatic break of the pencil, it was as if a boundary had been crossed and a warning had been given of what was to come.

Annika embodied and enacted the white racist figure when she entered my office, and there was no room for mistakes or jokes this time, rather she was

enacting a coloniality of power for the purpose of reinforcing whiteness as superior and dominant, ultimately eliminating and breaking the Black other. By articulating the words “*Damn N*gger*” the Black figure is transformed from that of an immoral, unskilled subordinate worker to that of a slave. This is a violent, degrading and traumatic representation of Blackness. In order to enforce colonial order, white subjects use the N-word as a violent rhetorical move to whip Black people into submission. The epistemic privilege of whiteness was reinstated as the position of authority and enunciation.

The Diversity plan and the salvationist rhetoric of modernity

In the encounter with the head principal, the rhetoric of modernity is expressed when she declares, “*we have a Diversity plan,*” which is code for “we are too progressive to act racist,” which further conceals the logic of coloniality. In many ways, the Diversity Plan mirrors the color-blind ideology that claims that people are equal regardless of their differences. The coloniality of power is thus reproduced, meaning racist acts become institutionalized and naturalized, as a means of suppressing the logic of coloniality that is hidden beneath the rhetoric of modernity.

In light of this, the school principal finds it shocking that Annika, a rational white subject who should know better, would even consider jeopardizing the multicultural contract that protects the school’s lucrative business of civilizing the dark others. In order for the Diversity plan to be valid, it must maintain the school’s reputation as a colorblind institution where all differences are treated equally.

While the Diversity Plan identifies diversity as a key component of the school, it does not alter the existing norms in the school or the Swedish society as a whole that still practice ideas of white supremacy and equate Swedishness with an exceptional ability of embodying anti-racism and equality (Hübinette and Lundström 2014). The underlying idea of Swedish exceptionalism is not dissolved by the Diversity Plan, but rather, the document serves only as a mechanism for ensuring that those outside of the exceptional Swedish whiteness are further dominated. Consequently, the salvationist rhetoric of modernity has positioned the white subject as too good, and humanistic to be a racist, resulting in the construction of white innocence (Wekker 2016). Therefore, the only reason why Annika would behave “irritational” would be if she had been provoked. This is why the head principal asks me, *what did you do that made her say so?* As if saying: what did you do to provoke her?

The unruly, the disobedient savages are constantly getting blamed according to the logic of “damned if you do, damned if you don’t.” Mignolo writes, there can be a “release of imperial violence” if the victim reacts against the colonial power and this imperial violence does not have to be physical, but rather, its

power lays in blaming the victim so that the cost of the racist injury is paid by the victim (2011b). In this case, even when Annika enacted her racism in front of colleagues, this imperial racist violence was tolerated, already indicating that it was the victim that was going to pay the price.

It is as if the Black African woman, who was probably employed as part of the implementation of the Diversity plan, has turned out to be a rebellious savage that is impossible to discipline: a failed colonial project. It is impossible for her darkness to be brought to light as part of the school's progressive narrative. She refuses to play the role of a Black counsellor who contributes to the progressive diversity plan as part of the process towards progressive integration of the Black other into the white civilized model of Swedish multiculturalism.

Thus, the epistemology of "white innocence" (Wekker 2016) perpetuates and reproduces the enactment of colonial power; an energy and a machinery for transforming differences into values. The value of whiteness, as a privileged position, remains protected through the epistemology of white innocence, while the devalued Black person experiences the underside of modernity, violence, harassment, dehumanization, and eventually poverty as a consequence of being forced out of the workplace. The school disposes of the Black figure in order to sustain the rhetoric of modernity and leave intact the logic of coloniality (Mignolo 2011a; 2011b).

[Victoria]

7. The Jackie Kay Day

1.
That day the Jackie Kay Plaza was opened
I walked across this space
squeezed between the grey buildings
dotted with light bulbs hanging in the air
people gathering for the event
apparently, some known literary figure
a student shrugged in passing to another
I walked on
an immediate sense of reckoning
that must be her
across the plaza
smiling
chatting away in the corner
glowing in celebratory mode

Seven Texts on Feminist Resistance

The flagship event of the Black History Month – they said –
as we gathered in an auditorium
listening to Jackie Kay
sharing her poems
her stories
her resistances
her giggles over the thought of her – Jackie Kay –
now having the chance to sit on the Jackie Kay Plaza
sipping a Jackie Kay
because why stop at naming cocktails after Black feminist lesbian Scottish poets
when you can name entire plazas after them

That day the Jackie Kay Plaza was opened
even that slight tingling sense of institutional tick boxing
that underlying feeling of appropriation
mixed with performative diversity and inclusion politics
couldn't take away from the power of the moment
of naming a plaza after Jackie Kay
the kind of thing that you might have thought
might happen only after you were dead – she said –
But I'm very much alive!
And alive to the nuances of renaming
and naming our buildings, streets, and plazas
after a whole new diverse generation of people
as those of us gathered in the room
in awe of her
cheering the moment
which is by all means achieved
never a given

2.

That day the Jackie Kay Plaza was opened
an elderly white woman blocked the entrance of a building to a Black man – my partner –
across the city in the West End
Where do you think you are going? I don't know you! – she yelled –
You don't live here!
standing in the doorway
spreading out her arms
preventing him from going home
as he was holding up his keys
furious and powerless all at once
Are you the delivery guy? You can't go in here!
Tell me where you live!

Loving Coalitions

questioning his presence in that space
as if she owns the entire building
I'm going to find out where you live! – she declared –
the history of white people controlling and policing Black bodies
reverberating heavy in the air
denying Black people entry into certain spaces
negating their sense of belonging
their very existence

And do what? – he raised his voice –
What are you going to do when you find out that I live here?
alive to the nuances of past injuries
summoned in this very situation
in a flash of a moment
but even he didn't expect this
the woman calling the authorities – as he later found out –
checking his visa status
because why stop at questioning his right to be in the building
when you can demand proof of his right to be in the entire country

That day the Jackie Kay Plaza was opened
the Black man kept insisting
What are you going to do when you find out that I live here?
What are you going to do?
challenging her assumptions
she didn't like it
she didn't expect it
and she ran with the narrative of damsel in distress
without mention of her own vitriolic words
spurred the husband into action
banging on the man's door
knowing exactly which one was his
kicking it
scaring his son – our son –
demanding to be let in
as if he owns the entire world
a familiar story
generations of practice
by all means achieved
never a given

3.
That day the Jackie Kay Plaza was opened
after all the questions about the poet's experiences

Seven Texts on Feminist Resistance

her writing style
her affinities
her rage at injustices
her places of healing
a little girl from the audience spoke up
As a mixed-race child, how do I deal with racism at school, Jackie?
breaking our hearts – my heart –
open in that very instant
raw and exposed
How do *I*
how do *you*
how do *we* deal with racism?
How *do* we do it?

My dear little one
make sure your inner narrative validates you
draw on your imagination
write revenge poetry if you have to
like I did as a child
let it all out
name the hurt
name the names of those who hurt you
don't let their narratives overtake you
they don't define you
you must name you

That day the Jackie Kay Plaza was opened
I queued for an autograph
marking the moment as one does
attuned to the nuances of naming and renaming
rehearsing words in my head
So honoured to meet you
thank you for your stories – I said –
I'm teaching your novel tomorrow in my class
but really
I couldn't forget the little girl's question
her concerned voice
and I blurted out, unplanned
How do I protect my son, Jackie?
How do I as a white mother protect my mixed-race child?
How do I protect him in a world that still controls and polices Black bodies?
she nodded knowingly, calm and smiling
gesturing towards her own son in the celebrating crowd
chatting with guests

Loving Coalitions

beaming with pride
*You see, all he needs is you in his corner
and you are there already
he is going to be ok* – she assured me

4.
That day the Jackie Kay Plaza was opened
I hurried home
still revelling in the warmth of the event
walking through the crispness of the night
as I entered the building, a message from a neighbour
*I am sorry to hear about the despicable treatment of your partner
I hope you are all ok*
I haven't yet heard
My heart goes out to him and the whole family
wait, what?
Stepping in, my partner utterly upset
shaken to his core
I gasp for air
every time that night as he recounts the incident
over and over again
to me, and over the phone
to his mother, his cousins, his friends
the hurt shared chipping at the hurt experienced
but never really taking it away

That day the Jackie Kay Plaza was opened
my world shrank in the violence of contrasts
still looming large
striking a jarring note
and while it won't be the last time this happens
I know this world continues to expand
with affirmations of perseverance and hope
if we remember
and we must remember
grit is always by all means achieved
never a given

[Redi]

Biography

At the beginning of 2021, seven interdisciplinary gender studies scholar-feminists—some fiction writers, poets, dancers, and mothers—of mixed ethnic and racial origin formed a collective called Loving Coalitions. Since all of us have worked/still work at different gender studies centres in Sweden, our initial aim was to take as a point of departure our different yet intersecting everyday experiences of feeling epistemically, racially, and existentially Othered within Swedish gender studies and society. Sharing an ethicopolitical commitment to work towards feminist coalition building, we have been collectively working and re-working our memories of the multiple and challenging border crossings each of us had to face, but without reproducing the colonial logic of divisions and taxonomies. In doing so, we felt the urgency to embrace our artistic sides and sabotage the academic writing norms by actively creating room and time for writing poems, (semi)fictional stories, testimonial texts, and letters to each other on burning and complex feminist issues that span from the colonial/racialised and neoliberal efforts to divide and rule us to the vital importance of feminist bridging and how to achieve it. Our combined research interests include Anti-racism, Afrophobia, Black feminism, African feminisms, Indigenous feminisms, Sámi studies, Postcolonial and Decolonial feminisms, Postsocialist feminisms, Museum Studies, Critical Migration Studies, Critical Race and Whiteness, Queer Widowhood, Death, Dying, Mourning and Spirituality in Queerfeminist Materialist and Decolonial perspectives, and Feminist Technoscience Studies. Concurrently, we love art and challenging the boundaries between literature, poetry, fiction, dance, and academic writing. We also engage with creative and collective methodological approaches such as Automatic Writing, Collective Memory Work, Visual Methods, and Indigenous Methodologies. We are currently weaving together our discussions, letters, poems, memories, testimonies, and stories into a collective book publication that celebrates the journey of a beautiful coalition of seven different yet interconnected (non-hegemonic) feminists: *Memories that Bridge: Weaving Feminist (Her)Stories in Loving Coalition*.

Victoria Kawesa (PhD candidate, Linköping University), **Maria Vlachou** (Postdoctoral Researcher, Linköping University), **Ina Knobbloek** (Lecturer, Gaskeuniversiteete/Mid Sweden University), **Redi Koobak** (Chancellor's Fellow and Senior Lecturer, University of Strathclyde), **Tara Mehrabi** (Senior Lecturer, Karlstad University), **Madina Tlostanova** (Professor, Linköping University), and **Nina Lykke** (Emerita Professor, Linköping University and Adjunct Professor at Aarhus University, Denmark).

Notes

1. The book manuscript is under preparation.
2. The text and poem are excerpts from Maria's letter to the whole collective. The bolded words in Maria's poem refer to individual writings of the collective's members.
3. The poem is woven together by Indigenous, especially Sámi, feminist voices. More extensive quotes are included in the forthcoming article: Knoblock, Ina. 2024. "'A Rape of the Earth': Sámi Feminists against Mines." *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 23 (1).

Biret (pseudonym): lines 6, 8, 14–15, 21–23

Márjá (pseudonym): lines 7, 9–12,

Sagka (pseudonym): lines 2–3, 5, 13

Ylva Maria Pavval: lines 4, 18–20

Line 1 contains a quote by Sámi feminist Rauna Kuokkanen: "the world as a whole comprises of an infinite set of relationships" (2007, 32). Line 15 "they make us, our legal orders, our histories, invisible" and line 16 "the violence of emptying the land is being obscured" paraphrases a quote by Binizaá (Zapotec) scholar Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez (2020, 325).

4. Khutema is a variety of Adyghean pear that resembles bergamot. It is considered a holy tree and its branch is used in annual Circassian New Year celebrations when it is adorned with homemade candles and a round smoked cheese, and becomes the centre of rebirth and new life rituals.
5. Sozeris is one of the key gods of the Adyghean pantheon, a patron of farmers but also travelers, particularly sea travelers. Sozeris's coming is celebrated every year on the winter solstice, which is regarded as a Circassian analogue of the New Year celebration.
6. Gumzag is an Adyghe name meaning a restless heart.
7. Goshfit is an Adyghe name meaning freedom loving.
8. Nahata (Nehuatl) is an Adyghe name meaning green-eyed.
9. Aslan is a very popular name in the Caucasus meaning lion. It is of Turkic origin.
10. A typical Soviet colonial name showing that the father of this character still had an Indigenous name, Kambulat, while his son was already named in a Russian way – Anatoly, as a sign of assimilation. Hence a strange combination of a Russian name and a Circassian patronymic. My own version is the opposite – I have a Muslim Arabic name extremely popular in the Caucasus (Madina) and a Russian patronymic

Seven Texts on Feminist Resistance

- (Vladimirovna), which shows the loyalty of my paternal grandparents to the Russian/Soviet regime.
11. Simaz means literally “my moon.”
 12. Tkha is the main Adyghean god who created the world.
 13. Khyateguasha is a female deity who is the patron of the gardens.
 14. In the Soviet Union they used to broadcast *Swan Lake* on TV instead of the regular program when the General Party secretary died.
 15. Camara (from Adyghean *kuemar*) is a Greek name of the ancient small combat boats of a specific class that were typically built and used by the ancestors of modern Circassians.
 16. Kabarda or Circassian horse is an ancient breed of especially enduring horses that are fit for the mountains, it originated from the North Caucasus, specifically from Eastern Circassia or Kabarda.
 17. The poem “What If Every Critter’s Death Was Vibrant” was first printed as part of Nina Lykke’s *Vibrant Death. A Posthuman Phenomenology of Mourning*. London: Bloomsbury, 249 ff. Re-printed in accordance with the contractual agreement with the publisher, Bloomsbury Academic.
 18. The term “ahuman” refers to queerfeminist philosopher Patricia MacCormack’s *The Ahuman Manifesto: Activism for the End of the Anthropocene*, which radically experiments with “an alternate way of writing and reading” in order to “dismantle the dominance of the human” (2020, ix). With the term, MacCormack is attempting to find a speaking position resonating with her effort “to no longer argue like a human, with other humans” (ix).
 19. Cf. Mette Bryld and Nina Lykke (2000), *Cosmodolphins: Feminist Cultural Studies of Technology, Animals and the Sacred*. London: Zed.
 20. A version of this text will be published in my doctoral thesis, Victoria Kawesa (forthcoming): *Black Masks/White Sins: Becoming a Black Ubuntu Bulamu African Feminist*, Linköping University. The method I use in my research is autophenomenography (phenomenological analysis of autobiographical incidents). Through my bodily lived experiences of resistance, I explore my experiences growing up in an African normative context, Uganda, as well as my experiences becoming situated in a white western context, Sweden. In accordance with ethical research principles and standards, all names and locations are anonymized.

References

Ahmed, Sara. 2007. “The Phenomenology of Whiteness.” *Feminist Theory* 8: 149.

- Altamorano-Jiménez, Isabel. 2020. "Possessing Land, Wind and Water in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca." *Australian Feminist Studies* 35 (106): 321-335.
- Bryld, Mette, and Nina Lykke. 2000. *Cosmodolphins. Feminist Cultural Studies of Technology, Animals and the Sacred*. London: Zed.
- DiAngelo, Robin. 2018. *White fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Fanon, Frantz. 1952. Nygren Lars (translation). 2004. *Svart hud, vita masker*. Enskede: TPB. LIBRIS.
- Hübinette, Tobias, and Catrin Lundström. 2014. "Three phases of hegemonic whiteness: understanding racial temporalities in Sweden." *Social Identities* 20 (6): 423-437.
- Human Rights Watch. 2021. "Greece: Custody Bill Puts Women, Children at Risk: Reject Proposed Legal Changes; Improve Protections for Abuse Victims." *Human Rights Watch.org*, 6 May. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/06/greece-custody-bill-puts-women-children-risk>.
- Kalonaityte, Viktorija, Victoria Kawesa, and Adiam Tedros. 2008. Svarta (s) strategier: att hantera rasism och diskriminering som svart svensk *Socialvetenskaplig tidskrift* 15 (3-4).
- Kuokkanen, Rauna. 2007. *Reshaping the University: Responsibility, Indigenous Epistememes, and the Logic of the Gift*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Lykke, Nina. 2022. *Vibrant Death. A Posthuman Phenomenology of Mourning*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- MacCormack, Patricia. 2020. *The Ahuman Manifesto: Activism for the End of the Anthropocene*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Mignolo, Walter. 2011a. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- . 2011b. "Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto." *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, School of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts, UC Merced: 45.
- Puwar, Nirmal. 2004. *Space Invaders: Race, Gender, and Bodies out of Place*. Oxford: Berg.
- Tlostanova, Madina, and Walter Mignolo 2009. "On pluritopic hermeneutics, trans-modern thinking, and decolonial philosophy." *Encounters* 1 (1): 11-27.
- Wekker, Gloria. 2016. *White innocence: Paradoxes of colonialism and race*. Durham: Duke University Press.