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FEMINIST RESISTANCE

Guest Edited by
Danine Farquharson, Andreae Callanan
& Mariana Ramírez

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Cover Art
“The Warrior”
by Chun Hua
Catherine Dong

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If Not Now, When?

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Chun Hua Catherine Dong's *The Warrior*: Choosing Resilience

Joëlle Dubé

Introduction

Dressed in matching camo pants, t-shirt and cap, Chun Hua Catherine Dong's face is entirely covered in deer hide she has painstakingly glued onto her face prior to the performance. Over the course of 2.5 hours, the China-born and Tiohtiá:ke/Montréal-based artist sits atop a bright yellow scaffolding, towering over the audience of the Harold J. Miossi Art Gallery, in San Luis Obispo, California in 2017. An assistant slowly pushes the scaffolding around the space as the performance unfolds. Dong imperceptibly moves as she travels across space in yoga poses: slouching over the edge of the scaffolding, lying on her side and on her back, holding the tree, the corpse, and the easy yoga poses. Already viewed as a meditative practice, the yoga poses are deliberately performed in the slowest way possible, as if to make way for the expansive and generous temporality of self-care. The slowness of her movement can also be attributed to her being completely deprived of sight. Conscientious of not falling over the edge, or making any rushed movements, Dong embraces the almost forced meditative state in which she finds herself.

At one point during the slow-paced performance, the assistant strategically positions the scaffolding right underneath the skylight. There, the artist takes on the yoga posture of The Warrior I, as hinted by the title of the performance: both her hands are enjoined over her head, stretched toward the sky, all the weight of her body rests on her left leg, while her right leg is in extension. Her shadow is disproportionately projected onto the bare white walls of the gallery, multiplying and monumentalizing her gesture. A foundational pose of yoga āsana, the Warrior I symbolizes power and strength (Sarbacker 2021, 195). According to Yoga Basics, an educational yoga website, the one who adopts any of the Warrior poses (there are five variations) embodies "the auspicious and heroic energy of a warrior" (Yoga Basics). Additionally, Warrior I is said to be conducive to overcoming life's challenges (Yoga Basics). While this is meant to be experienced by the one *performing* the pose, witnessing it invites a slow, meditative introspection on the part of the viewers too.

Adopting the Warrior I pose can also be read as a caring and reparative act. In the article "The Body as Infrastructure," authors Luis Andueza et al. argue that the human body can be perceived as an ongoingly reconfigured lively infrastructure. They ask "how we might ensure the love, care and repair that is

necessary to sustain our fleshy forms when confronted with the violence of capitalist abstraction" (Andueza et al. 2021, 800) so tightly enmeshed with the logic of imposed resilience, I might add. In indulging in acts of self-care—through positive, reparative, and sustainable gestures and actions—Dong offers to the viewers a critical strategy to transfigure inescapable violence. As a voyage into the inner self, yoga is all about making peace with one's body and mind, which can, in turn, allow one to mediate troubling situations with more clarity. To care for others, we need to care for ourselves. That is the argument put forward by the artist when she comments: "I care about myself because I matter, if I matter, we matter, we are transforming what matters." What Dong suggests is a reverberating expansion of care in concentric circles (outwards from the self), as a strategy for self-resilience.

In introducing *The Warrior* performance, the organizers of the Inverse Performance Art Festival comment on how Dong "is interested in grappling with ways of using and enacting self-care as an act of resilience. She seeks to relate sustainable gestures or actions that can transform balance without inhibiting balance itself" (Inverse). Not only does this strategy help come to grasp with external violence, but it also offers a way of transforming such violence, without engaging with it directly; that is, without representing or depicting it. International relations scholars Brad Evans and Julian Reid speak to a deep sense of powerlessness associated with imposed resilience on neoliberal subjects when writing that: "To be resilient, the subject must disavow any belief in the possibility to secure itself from the insecure sediment of existence, accepting instead an understanding of life as a permanent process of continual adaptation to threats and dangers which appear outside its control" (Evans and Reid 2014, 68). The artist's body becomes a site of subversion and satire where violence is appropriated, transfigured, and processed (Dong). It is in this sense of transformation that self-care appears as a feminist strategy of radical resilience and of adaptation to troubling externalities. Chosen resilience anchored in care, as put forward by Dong, stands as an empowering stance rather than a constricting one.

Biography

Chun Hua Catherine Dong (she/they) is a Chinese-born Tiohtià:ke/ Montréal-based multimedia artist. Dong received an MFA at Intermedia from Concordia University and a BFA at Visual Art from Emily Carr University Art & Design in Canada. Dong has exhibited their works at The Musée d'Art Contemporain du Val-de-Marne in France, Quebec City Biennial, The International Digital Art Biennial Montreal (BIAN), MOMENTA | Biennale de l'image, Kaunas Biennial, Canadian Cultural Centre Paris, Foundation PHI for Contemporary Art, The Aine Art Museum in Tornio, Bury Art Museum in Manchester, Museo de la Cancillería in Mexico City, Art Gallery of Hamilton, The Rooms Museum, Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, DongGang Museum of Photography in South Korea, He Xiangning Art Museum in Shenzhen, Hubei

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Museum of Fine Art in China, Art Museum at University of Toronto, Varley Art Gallery of Markham, and others.

Dong has performed in many international performance art festivals, such as Rapid Pulse International Performance Art Festival in Chicago, 7a*11d International Festival of Performance Art in Toronto, ENCUENTRO Performance in Santiago, The Great American Performance Art in New York, Place des Arts in Montréal, Infr'Action in Venice, Dublin Live Art Festival in Dublin, Experimental Action/ Performance Art in Houston, Internationales Festival für Performance in Mannheim, Inverse Performance Art Festival in California, Miami Performance International Festival, Nuit Blanches in Montréal, Visualeyez Performance Festival in Edmonton, M:ST Performance Art Festival in Calgary, and many public art galleries and spaces in Europe and North and South America. Dong's video work has been screened in Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Colombia, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, UK, USA, and more. Among many other grants and awards, Dong was the recipient of the Franklin Furnace Award for performance art in New York in 2014, listed the "10 Artists Who Are Reinventing History" by Canadian Art in 2017, and was named "The Artist of the Year" at the DongGang International Photo Festival in South Korea in 2018. Dong was also a finalist for Contemporary Art Award at Le Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (Prix en art actuel du MNBAQ) 2020, and awarded with Cultural Diversity in Visual Arts Award by the Conseil des arts de Montréal in 2021.

Joëlle Dubé is a member of *Esse*'s editorial committee and is also pursuing an interdisciplinary doctorate in humanities at Concordia University. She is studying contemporary Indigenous art and, in her work, she seeks to rearticulate the relationship between current and future life.

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Editors' Note: Truffle Fries and Trouble

Danine Farquharson, Andraea Callanan, and Mariana Ramírez

Introduction

Sunday, 3 December 2023: Andreae Callanan, Mariana Ramírez, and I meet at a hotel bar for a late lunch and drinks and a conversation about feminist resistance.

Danine: We should have started recording a few seconds ago because we started with fuck the patriarchy.

Mariana: Yeah, we always start with that.

Danine: Oh wait, here comes our fries. That's awesome. [pause for fries]. So, this issue of the journal is way bigger than I ever anticipated. [To Andreae]: do you have any thoughts about the poetry contributions?

Andreae: What was interesting was, the last time we had four published poems was the first issue [of *Janus Unbound*] and those were poems I went out and solicited from people I knew I wanted to hear from; we were just starting. This time they came to us, which was very exciting for me because it meant I got an array of poems to choose from representing different voices and, weirdly, kinda representing the voices that I dreamed of having. There were people who I was going to reach out to who ended up submitting anyway. And I was, like, "thank you!" So I'm happy with the diversity of voices. It's interesting how they tie into each other but also how differently that theme of feminist resistance works with each of them. Resisting different notions of what femininity is, resistance around gender-based violence. But the way the voices come together was really exciting to see.

Danine: The thing that I've been thinking about is what is so clear about this collection is that it's all about voice. It's not just about allowing space for diverse voices to have their moments, but it's about voices being heard *and believed*, and not doubted, and voices being able to speak or write in whatever way they want to. I think the big difference with this issue compared to other issues

of *Janus Unbound*—and to be honest most other academic journals, with a few exceptions—is there is also a resistance to "traditional" academic discourse, which is patriarchal. What I love most with this issue is the diversity of voices and how differently they speak.

Mariana: I really enjoyed reading the contributions progressively through the last months and every time I read one of them, they stay in my head. It is about voices but it's also about how we perform our voices; how we open a space for ourselves without conforming entirely to the system. With the piece about social media, for example, I started noticing the posts on my own social media and how they conformed to systems that I didn't agree to and I enjoyed altering my algorithm to exclude those things and to bring in those feminist pieces of resistance that we're not used to receiving. It's really cool.

Danine: It's also interesting to learn from these people different strategies; different types of places and situations and what can work (or not) in terms of resistance. Sometimes I feel like there's not much I can do to resist being silenced in a particular way and then I read something about just keeping on keeping on talking and speaking and doing. It's energizing to me.

[Woman walks by table and exclaims: "Truffle fries! I can smell them over here. They're awesome!"]

Mariana: It's hard to speak when we're eating! [laughter]

Danine: In my mind, when we came up with this issue theme, I was thinking "Oh, wouldn't it be great if we had something like this, or something like that." And, just like with the poetry, we got those submissions. Something happened when our CFP came out that someone in Sweden shared it with everyone they knew and we got a lot of great work from Sweden. To our Swedish contributors: thank you!

Andreae: I've been thinking a lot about the theme too, what does feminist resistance mean in my life right now? What are we resisting? I think, for me, given everything that is in my field of concerns at this moment, part of that resistance is resisting false narratives. One of those false narratives is that our struggles are individual and that fights for liberation are distinct from each other and not tied together. There's certainly something to be said for "staying in your lane" and not making statements about things you don't know about, but there's also something to be said about learning what is going on in the world and recognizing how all these things thread together. Not just about anti-imperialist struggles, and I consider feminist resistance to be an anti-imperialist struggle, but also looking at how the tools of oppression happen again and again.

One of the things I've been thinking about a lot lately is the similarities between rhetoric that is being used in mainstream Western media—we're

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recording this on 3 December, we are 50-however many days into the latest siege of Gaza and to new levels of violence throughout Palestine—and the ways that genuine trauma is manipulated and exploited. An example is how the West is spinning the Israel-Palestine situation. We have a group of people, the Jews, who have every reason to fear antisemitism. Antisemitism didn't begin in World War II, it didn't end in World War II, the Holocaust is within living memory, antisemitism is rising throughout Europe and North America. We've seen, in our own recent social media memories, people marching and chanting antisemitic slogans in the streets in the US. These are real things. It is rational for people to be afraid of that. And then we see this imperialist spin on it, where the thing you're supposed to be afraid of is not the rise of fascism in Europe or increasing antisemitism in the US, but the existence of the Palestinian people. That's what we're supposed to be afraid of: a child throwing a rock that is actually rubble from their home that was bombed.

The spin is that the people who are the most vulnerable become the people to be feared.

Danine: The most villainized …

Andreae: and the most dehumanized. If we shift over to a more gendered example of that, the rhetoric around trans liberation in the US especially, but we see it in Canada as well, women have every reason to be afraid of sexual violence. We have every reason to be afraid that our children will be abused. We have every reason to believe that because it's rational. We live with that violence; we experience that violence in one form or another. It is reasonable for us to fear that. And yet, no matter how much evidence you look at to suggest that perpetrators of these acts of violence are usually cis-gendered men in positions of power (pastors, teachers, sports coaches) we are meant to believe that the "real" threat to our safety is a trans woman in the bathroom, or a queer elementary schoolteacher, or a librarian.

Mariana: Or drag queens.

Andreae: It would be funny and absurd except people are dying. I think part of feminist resistance is finding and seeing those patterns of rhetoric, of spin, and manipulation of legitimate fears and exposing them for the absurdity that sustains them.

Danine: What happens with that kind of narrative manipulation, that you so beautifully illustrated, is that there are so many types of people being violated and oppressed who are being silenced at the same time. That's what drives me bonkers – how that false narrative is able to expansively shut down legitimate fears and concerns. It's remarkable and it's why we can't stop.

Andreae: It also pits marginalized groups against each other.

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Danine: It villainizes resistance. It makes those people who stand up and speak out for change the ones to fear.

Mariana: It makes me so mad I might burst into tears.

Andreae: I'm on the verge of tears 24/7 right now.

Mariana: In Mexico, people are starting to wake up to the severe, dangerous gendered violence—to the point where Mexico is on the verge of being the place with the most feminicides in the world.[1] A couple of years ago, because of the murdered women and the disappeared women, the women of Mexico started going into the streets. The protests never got violent, we never attacked anyone, but we did intervene with public monuments and public offices. It was shocking to see how the narrative changed. How the media changed what should have been "these women are doing this because they are being raped and killed on a daily basis" into "these crazy feminists are destroying patrimony. They don't respect the country. They don't respect you. They are burning things down."

It was dividing. I erased people from my Facebook. My feminist journey has changed a lot. Angry, then it's ok, then it's angry again. Right now I am fuming. It's very hard to negotiate surviving this system and at the same time standing fast in my convictions. It's hard to find that balance. It breaks you.

Danine: No one person can do it all, we have to choose our battles in terms of when we have the resources to bring to the fight. In terms of year three of the pandemic, our energies are low, but I have felt—even before the pandemic—that we are at a tipping point. And I'm not even talking about climate change. I'm talking about social revolution and what is fascinating and terrifying at the same moment is that I have no way of knowing which way it's going to go. That's why it's a tipping point. I do believe in the cumulative effect.

I tormented myself a bit about suggesting the theme of feminist resistance for this issue. I thought, oh, we're just going to have one issue on feminism and then it's ghettoized. But right now, I'm: NO. We need to gather the voice as we want to. And the one great thing about *Janus Unbound* is that it's online and hopefully has a longer life than the paper copies gathering dust. There is power in numbers.

Mariana: I was thinking about this while watching a True Crime documentary, and this female psychologist was speaking about how many survivors [of sexual violence] do not want to report it. And she was arguing, and I think she's right, that silence is also a way of resisting. Not going into the system because it does not work for you. Saying no to a system that does not fight for you. Saying I will not rely on this colonial, misogynistic, patriarchal system that says it's going to save me, because it's not doing that. The system does not protect victims or allow them to thrive. Not participating is also resistance – especially with

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dominant structures like law and academia. Both loud voices and cold silence are weapons of resistance.

But we must take into account that not every woman has the privilege of saying "I don't want to speak about it." For many women there is no choice: they cannot speak about it. At least this issue has intersectionality. The one good thing about the patriarchy –

Danine: Is there one? [laughter]

Mariana: The patriarchy is so broad that we have enough fighters to fight it from every single angle. There are enough of us.

Andreae: If there were subtitles to this, we'd need: "Mariana smiles, ironically."

Danine: I'll add that in for sure.

Andreae: I do feel helpless so often. We are always struggling with the question of what is doing the work. What, practically, is the solution. I can't kick down the door of someone's office and say: everyone stop, go to your corners and think about what you've done. Can't do that. So what does the work look like? It's reading and it's talking but those things feel like – what can I do? It's a huge frustration. So this issue is kind of doing the work but it's not.

We need to mobilize all the fronts we can. We can do all of the things and it's still not enough.

The reason why it doesn't feel like enough is because we've never seen what the world can be like without patriarchy. We don't know what we're working toward.

Mariana: It's been frustrating for me too, moving here as an International student and building up a new group of friends. Because in Mexico, all of my friends think the same way. They would never say anything sexist by accident. But here, the amount of things I've heard! And I don't know what to do: should I say something, should I start a conversation. What's the best way to correct the narratives? It depends on my mood. If I'm in a good mood, then I will I sit down and say "hey, let me explain why what you said is problematic." If I'm in a bad mood then I just fight. And that doesn't feel like I'm advancing the solution.

Andreae: One of the things that keeps hitting me is that I'm going to these weekly protests, right? And there are people protesting alongside who I've seen at protests for every cause since I was 15 years old. They were the "old lefties" then and now I'm the middle-aged lefty and they're the retired lefties. I look at them and it makes me so sad that they're still at this.

Danine: I do believe, very strongly, there are a lot of people feeling similarly around situations that are not identical but are close and things will come

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together. Or there will be a flashpoint – which is scary because flashpoint is always violent. I thought COVID-19 would be it, but I was totally wrong.

Mariana: One thing that I've noticed, since the pandemic, is sorority. It's more of a thing now. I've noticed more girl support has increased.

Danine: Do you mean a kind of sisterhood?

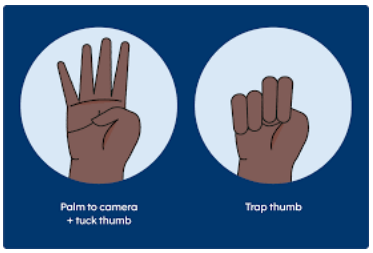
Mariana: Ya, just keeping an eye out for danger. I remember walking home and it was getting dark out. This group of girls were "hey, we're walking in the same direction. Walk along. Join us." Those little things, I didn't notice before.

Danine: That never would have happened when I was in my twenties. It might have been unspoken but never out loud.

Mariana: I was in a bar and this girl approached me and said: "this guy is not leaving me alone. Please pretend you're my best friend and we're going to another bar." And I did it without even thinking.

Andreae: I'm thinking of some of the ham-fisted attempts by white women, particularly in the wake of the Trump presidency, to show women that I'm a safe person. And I know people were online and asking: what do you do when you're on the subway and see someone snatch a hijab. And answers came in like: I carry extra scarves with me because people need them. We had this short, failed, moment where white women were wearing "safety pins"—it didn't work. But I know there was a lot of conversation online about how to intervene. What are the specific things I can do to let women know that they can be safe with me?

Mariana: Back home things are so bad. It is urgent how dangerous it is for women in Mexico. In school this was taught to me in school [makes hand gesture of fist with thumb tucked under four other fingers]. A woman from the UN came to our school and taught us that if you see a woman doing this:



Then she needs help. Call someone. Help them.

Danine: I've never seen that before.

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Andreae: Me either.

Mariana: Since I was very young, we were taught by other women to react quickly. We were taught how to ask certain questions. It is good that we know this but it is also traumatic.

Danine*:* Absolutely. We have to move through the world with learned defence mechanisms.

Andreae: I remember when my daughter was born, I was living in the North-west Territories. So a lot of my friends there were Indigenous, Dene nation, and were having kids at the same time. They were my friend group. A friend's daughters, they were probably 10 or 11 or 12, and they had won an award at school for a presentation they did on missing, murdered, and Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG) and they're both Indigenous girls. And they had to showcase their trauma. I teach my kids about gender-based trauma but it's not a thing my kids have to fear in the way that Indigenous kids have to fear. Not in the same way. My sons do not fear violence the same way that Black youth fear violence. It's not the same level of constant threat. My kids could go to the police for help in a way that my friends' kids cannot. To have to live with that and to have to exist with the level of violence that they and their cultural community has to survive. I think about how limiting that is for me.

Mariana: As an International student you talked to other International students. We all face racism. For the male students, they say "meh" it's ok. But for the women? The racism is directly related to the oversexualization of coloured women. It's another level of paranoia for me. I was walking down the street and two guys were walking behind me and talking very loudly about how they hated immigrants, and how they want to kill all of them, and "rape all those bitches."

Andreae: And this is how the patriarchy works. I think Kate Manne writes about this. Have you read *Down Girl*?[2] She talks about how patriarchy persists by punishing some women but not all of them. Look at me: I'm sorta grey, I'm a bit pudgy, I'm not a target of sexualization the way that I was 20 years ago. I think nothing of walking home alone in the dark, because no one sees me. I'm invisible and so I'm safe.

Danine: I think there is almost more power in women doubting other women than men doubting women. Because if a woman has been silenced or misheard or misbelieved, if she goes to her female community and someone replies with "Oh, don't be so silly, I've the best experience with that person" then that kind of diminishing of value of the lived experience is far more powerful than coming from a man who we don't trust anyway. Let's trust our sisters.

All three [with glasses]: Trust our sisters. Feminist Resistance.

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Notes

1. "In 2022, it was estimated that the national femicide rate in Mexico stood at 1.43 cases per 100,000 women. Three years earlier, the number of Mexican women murdered on account of their gender reached the highest rate at least since 2017, exceeding 1.5 victims per 100,000 female inhabitants. Ranked as the second-highest nation for femicides in Latin America, just below Brazil, Mexico's cases show a sustained rise, recording over 920 in 2022. A disconcerting pattern emerges, with many perpetrators having familial or communal affiliations. The government's lack of interest and effectiveness has spurred social activism, advocating for justice and enhanced safety measures for the female population." (https://www.statista.com/statistics/979065/mexico-number-femicides/.)
2. Manne, Kate. 2019. *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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Beatricia Braque

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The Red Wheelbarrow

The Red Wheelbarrow
by William Carlos Williams

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

So much depends upon a red wheelbarrow. The weather is something that we must take into consideration, because said wheelbarrow could be covered by rain, but it could also be constantly exposed to the sun. So much would then depend on the orangey wheelbarrow and its decay.

The wheelbarrow in the poem will be forever red and covered by rain, but even the heaviest rain stops. The drops that adorn the wheelbarrow will eventually slide and disappear. We would then have to think about where said wheelbarrow is located, in what geopolitical situation, what religion does it profess, what's it's sexual preference. 1 in 10 red wheelbarrows have been victims of sexual violence. This largely depends on the wheelbarrow's owners. There are those who take care of them, when they finish using them they keep them in a safe place, but this is not always the case.

The owners of the wheelbarrows are also the ones who assign a value to them. A red wheelbarrow with just any owner is not worth the same as the red wheelbarrow that belongs to the largest collector of red wheelbarrows in Wyoming, or the red wheelbarrow that Elvis played with in his childhood.

A long time ago a brief math test circulated on the internet. After solving some problems, the test asked you to think of a color and a tool. 98% of the people thought of a red hammer.

So much depends on that red hammer. Like the one with which my father would build a house for my dog, if my father had participated in my childhood, if he had given me a dog.

The use to which the imagined hammer was put also matters. A red hammer that was used to build a bookcase is not the same as the red hammer that is in custody for having been used as a murder weapon on August 11, 2014.

In the same way, the use that is given to said wheelbarrow is of the utmost importance. It is possible that it was used to transport chickens after cutting their heads off and making them into broth. Perhaps it is the blood of these chickens that gives the wheelbarrow on which so much depends its red color. Perhaps the chickens while observing the wheelbarrow used to say goodbye to each other by flapping their wings for one last time.

Biography

Beatricia Braque studied Literature at the *Universidad de las Américas Puebla* (UDLAP). In addition she completed the Diploma Program with the work, "Liminal: Research and Artistic Creation" at the *Centro de Investigación, Innovación y Desarrollo de las Artes* (Centre for Research Innovation and Development in the Arts: CEIIDA) in 2022. Her most recent work, "*Tránside o Qué desmembrar sino palaciegos orangutanes de tan suave*" ("Transide or What to Dismember But Palatial Orangutans So Soft") will be published in *Ediciones del Olvido* in their collection of Contemporary Mexican Poetry in 2023.

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A. Broughton-Janes

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Binding Tape

my words pass over the wound like water
instead of blood, it is empty
a space where identity should reside
the pain is the nothingness
the pain is the walls crushing in
broken glass
every glance in the mirror is distorted
Who is the person I see there?
because I've been told
Be a good girl
Be kind, be gentle
Be passive
Put yourself outside for others

Who is that?
I've emptied myself to become that person
and now they want more
They want my body
They want me to desire
They want me objectified
They want me to smile
the light is gone
the moment they sexualized my body
I knew that I was nothing
and the darkness took over

the shell created for me is a weight on my heart
a millstone around the neck of a person who just wants to live
the void inside me is screaming
dysphoria
the pain of emptiness
gagging on expectations force fed down my throat
taking every attempt to fill me with what is not mine
I am translucent
I can't breathe
I want this space for me!
let me create

holding out under the pressure
as the walls are crumbling in
soon they will see
in the light of day
I am empty
There is nothing here they will understand

binding tape
holding me together to stand up to some semblance of a fight
breaking the boxes around their minds
before I return to the hole that is mine
and tear off the pain
hot and scarred from my chest
like a million knives to my heart
but my heart is no longer there
binding tape
my armor against the world
defending my peace
staking claim to my emptiness
So that when they judge me
Maybe they will judge me as me

Biography

A. Broughton-Janes is a student studying Philosophy at Memorial University. They are focused on Gender Philosophy and Theory, and look to share their experiences as a LGBTQ+ person through poetry and writing.

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Daze Jefferies

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Umbilicus

comforted hours through the lull of low dusk

Raining for a week now, tepid on flesh, with ten degree weather in the downtown periphery. Stay a little longer → the heart of our strowl on old Water Street is forever indulgent. Atmosphere swelled with merchantry's excess. You could feel it nearing when the ships were tied. Years an urbane fair sex had strayed from one end to another, kneeling into plenitude, window, slipway. Spin in a circle and watch how the dust haired lovergirl goes.

Haunt of breath, a humid dawn. Gossip evaporated out of their mouths (I learned this from a kittiwake who dwelled around the anchorage). Seabirds have talked to me since I was a baygirl. Nan said it's because my eyes are grey, a gift from God, and the gulls are seraphic.◡ Can't believe angels eat fish guts and garbage, though, fending for yourself is an island-bound inheritance. At least until you refuse tradition, see. It got me w/here.

◡ when a bad date comes nearby

dear sky witnesses squawk him away

with droppings all over his gaudy auto

Missing, the hole has a voice now: enough already.

Hear them? Mutual whispers resound against crestfallen overflow, tending to indifference. Mistress determined a patrolman's tongue will be cut out and fed to the feathered ones.◡ Believe these whoregrounds were erected with love, clawn and extant, crevice-nesting. Dreamlike, all it took me to go, the poke of a licked finger deep in my umbilicus.

Tentacular light, known only as kinship, reached through The Narrows, capturing m/e. A throwaway coddess, pleasurer, severed, and dead to the world (never harbourfront whirlygirls), I woke on a raft made of drift-worn lumber. Blue top, body throbbing, rapt. No place to stumble and no past to drown in a foremother's bosom, but closer now. These bones'll wait for the gullies to circle and cry out over another offshore. Facing yet-to-last, an annum. Would she come to somewhore else?

◡ eggs are given as gesture or keepsake

honouring the presence of a body ephemeral

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Biography

Daze Jefferies (she/her) is an artist, writer, and educator who holds a Master of Gender Studies from Memorial University. She is the author of *Water/Wept* (Anstruther Press, 2023) and co-author (with Sonja Boon and Lesley Butler) of *Autoethnography and Feminist Theory at the Water's Edge: Unsettled Islands* (Palgrave, 2018).

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Tara Propper

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Back Brace

The huddled vertebrae bracket themselves,
warding incursion, knotting the spine,
and I am slender supine
in my bone-colored
brace, skin-seams callousing, form colluding
against shape.

The back aches for the exactitude
of even shoulders and legs—a reclamation
of balance. The genius of 90 degrees
flush flat against a chair's back—against the squeeze
of constraint.
Like a saint, I am beyond bodily.

I have transubstantiated
from C-curve to X-Axis
from mass to matter
from filament to fiber
and there is no purity, only exoneration,
only enamel-laden reformation.

Biography

Tara Propper has earned her MFA in Creative Writing and PhD in English. Her chapbook, *This body was never made*, is under contract with Finishing Line Press. She is currently an Assistant Professor of English in the Department of Literature and Languages at the University of Texas at Tyler.

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Ataraxia[1] & Placemaking Black*Mothering* in the academy

Julia Lynch and Monisha Atkinson

This poetic writing calls in the Ancestral mothers (female truth sayers/storytellers) that allow passage of a writing performance that tells of how Black*Mothering* cultivates a way to resist grief within the academy to access peace and joy. This piece speaks to how Black*Mother*-Scholars use peace and place as a fugitive praxis of resistance that provides a network of navigation for others and themselves in a place that has worked to exclude a Black women's identity as a mother, a Black women's intellectualism, and Black women's teachings. We offer a Black spiritual call-and-response aesthetic to continuously engage ourselves, fully in our work, while also helping our readers become one with feeling, emotionality, and reckoning that seeks to use text as a transformational act to justice. An invitation to be evoked.

Call

As Black*Mothers* in the academy, we have made attempts to locate ourselves on a campus dominated by Westernized teaching, knowledge, research, and the gaze of whiteness during our first few years as faculty. We have sorted through thoughts about our identity as it relates to our location on a campus constructed by our people but not for our people. It was a struggle, and our hearts grew heavy with grief. In our search for belonging, we thought deeply about the labour of Black folks, and then we remembered the labour of the Black folks who built many of the institutions where we were working. Sifting through the gaze in search of a safe haven, we thought that somehow our being mothers would create a common thread, at least among our white counterparts. We thought that our mothering commonality as part of our Black identity would position us to seem less threatening. To be sure, being a mother, and then a Black mother would offer some sense of relief for our desolate spirits. Instead, what we discovered in the sorting and sifting was the way the academy viewed our mothering as a sign of ineffectiveness, illness, and a production-line malfunction. We often felt that our social class didn't matter within the academy; as Black mothers, we still faced implicit and explicit biases. In what manner was the exchange of money equivalent to labour, the laborious conditions, and the dehumanizing effects of working within an organization that constituted such? Our thoughts and the labour of being Black and a mother, the expectations of motherhood that society places, and the exclusion of mothering in an institution that holds true to their capitalistic governance. Mothers expect to uphold

an institution with their labour while neglecting their home, mental health, and sense of self. There are multiplied layers of stereotypes that a Black woman mother continuously reckons with trying to prove her capabilities, intellect, and worthiness of place in the academy.

As we call in our Ancestral mothers (female truth sayers/storytellers) who allow passage of a writing performance, we also tread along the same path as our theoretical scholars who help us to conceptualize Black*Mothering* Scholarship (BMS), drawing closely from mothering (Lorde 2007; Walker 2004), motherscholars (DePouw 2017; Matias 2011), and ParentCrit (Matais and Bitz, 2021) that are rooted in love and justice. With much respect to this body of literature, our work is situated within the same Mothering Diaspora, locating us specifically within the US Black Rural South, which helps posit our Black*Mothering* parallel to the ways our location, in previously colonized states, have situated us in the US Rural Black South. It is here we (re)member rural to mean the ways Blacks were and still are isolated and excluded, without access to freedom, and therefore excluded from the freedom that education brings. This very distinct niche helps us to further conceptualize how Black*Mothering* is posited and how it is interculturally dependent on community for the preservation of life. This project draws upon BMS as a critical theoretical framework to fully capture the historical and contemporary practices of Black*Mothering* that attend to the needs of their family and community. BMS helps frame the beliefs, practices, attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors of mothering (regardless of gender or parental familial considerations) that Blacks take up as a way of cultural sustainability. This framework also acknowledges how Black*Mothering* as scholars is extended outside of academia to fully encapsulate the ways Black mothers use their communal and cultural intuition as knowledge to read, understand, and engage in the world. We see this emerging theoretical framework in five specific areas: protection, care, spirituality, mobility, and socio-political awareness. As Black faculty researchers, this theoretical framework was used to help posit our own identities along with how we see ourselves engaging in critical teaching pedagogy. Therefore, in this (re)membrance, we draw our readers also into (re)establishing how US Black rural education is also defined within the US Black South and the implications for how colonialism pervades our educational systems, the ways Blacks continuously suffer because of the colonial project persistence, and how colonialism extends post-colonial as rurality.

Since our early days as students and employees at a Western-dominated university, we were plagued with the persistent odor of imposter syndrome. On campus, instructional and research activities, as well as recruiting practices, all contribute to an environment that reeks of colonialism. A scent of melancholy permeates the air whenever the thought of how Black folks were banned from attending and working on a campus our Ancestors built. Due to the historical brutality of white hegemony and white supremacy, the vivid images of their arduous labour are stamped inside our memories, despite the absence of

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documentation. As a result, we navigate this space, ensuring that our Black identity is no longer overshadowed by imposter syndrome or the status quo.

Response

On Black & Inclusion
The days went by like a picture of Fall…
then Winter…then Spring.
in a timestamp and I
        wondered
about what lies over there.
From sun up to sun down, I get up
get dressed
and go to work
Building
brick by brick…for others-
I went over there one day and touched the wonderings I'd painted in my head of the building and the bricks,
It almost made me sick-
To think,
again
From sun up to sun down, I get up
Get dressed
And go to work
        Building…
Cause what is affirmative action?
The performativity of inclusion
Is all but an illusion
A mythical third space of delusion
That's why I get sick there
Sick with grief
Sick with pain
Sick with anguish

The next time I go over there, i'll be sure to build an altar
A place of cool & calm
A space where i/I belong
A place and space for my people
        Placemaking…

Call

Where do Black woman identity, Black woman intellectualism, and Black woman knowledge belong in a white colonial space? A space that only wants my labour and not my Black*Mother* scholarship? A space where the Black woman's effectiveness is measured by invisible lines of production-metrics that we are

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never privy to seeing. Black familial relationships create networked communities where often the title "mother," "aunt," or "sista" is used to describe a Black woman whose characteristics and roles supersede the formal relational position. In other words, although a formal mother, aunt, or sister may exist, the family may rely on villagers to also stand as such. Black*Mothers* work tirelessly for their community and often take on other children as their own.

Is our labour recognized in these white colonial places, but the instruments we use to express our identification as Black*Mother* scholars, our intellectualism, and our expertise are not? Does the cord of our Ancestral village elicit for white colonizers the perilous vocalizations of dehumanization, anti-Blackness, and enslavement? What is it about the production norms of white colonialism that systemically ensure that Black familial melodies such as "mother," "aunt," and "sista" are never even considered? Is it the rhythm of the community that evokes fear in the heart of the white colonizer? When in harmony with our community, the melodies we sang become a hymn of togetherness and reverence. Our positionality as "mother," "auntie" or "sista" takes joy in knowing we are each other's sanctuary, just as the musical discourse is. Any deficit ideologies are muted by the resonance of our Black woman identity, Black woman intellectualism, and Black woman knowledge, and the uniqueness of my community is amplified.

Response

On Black*Mother*-Scholas
Looking out at daybreak this morning
i woke up
to the stillness peace brings
i woke up
To the smell of fresh cut grass
And butterfly wings (they visit me often)

i whisper a word of prayer to strengthen my soul
Knowing what the workday could hold

The acrobatic play in my brain
Got me working,
Got me sweating,
Got me labouring
long hours
Trying to decide on how to prioritize
Got me competing for the Gold

Lifting my head from my prayer I breathe deep

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Exhaling grief
I know what they think of me
A Black*Mother*
I know what I know us to be
A Black*Mother* of the universe
Humanity

I know they take my love for humanity
And use it against me
Work me till the sun goes down
Got me wearing aprons
Cleaning up the filth
Got me going the extra mile
Faking smiles
All the while
Hurting, grieving
Got me doing what others won't-

like breastfeeding the others
Black*Mothers*

They love to hate us
Rape us
Use us

We spend long hours in labour
We spend long hours laboring
We spend long hours birthing

To not even be considered the owner
Stolen intellect
Stolen labour
Stolen property

Alter Call

We call on our other Black*Mother* scholars to help us make a place in the space that we occupy. A misogynist place of patriarchy that wasn't ever meant to include us. Black*Mothering* is resistance. It is the strong understanding of Black knowledge, Black intellect, and Black familial that understands the ways of colonialism yet creates a fugitive praxis of dwelling that prevents spirit murdering. Working in an uninvited place, yet not pulling up to a table forcing inclusion, however engaging in placemaking. We use each other as guided navigation to access success without forsaking who we are.

Black

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women
and mothers-
        Whole…*selah*

We use our mothering as a symbolic underground railroad compass that draws in others to help facilitate the journey through academia. We use our scholarship to help advance our communities, providing advocacy for parents and students in ways that reduce the access gap to higher education. As Black-*Mother* Scholars, our community remains within us, as we create a place within the academy for those who trail behind us. We use our mothering of others, to create an atmosphere of a sustained networking community that doesn't have to fight against the oppressive structures of higher education. There is a fugitivity of Black*Mothering* that resists the divide and conquer mechanisms that seek to unarm united power.

Trickle
        Trickle
Drip
Drop

Trickle
        Trickle
We'll neva stop

Neva cut off our feet
Our hands
Our noses
No- every piece of our body
goes

In-to victory-

Pouring our Black*Mothering* in-to others
So that our Ancestors' sufferings
were not in vain
The blood *still* works-
Amen.

Biography

Julia Lynch is a Visiting Assistant professor at the University of North Carolina Wilmington who earned her Ed.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from the

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University of North Carolina Wilmington, her MAEd in Reading Education, and her BS in Elementary Education from East Carolina University. As a Black public educator, Julia's tenure was focused primarily on under-resourced rural schools that served Black and brown communities. There, she was able to become a teacher leader in her district, building critical communities around conversations of culturally sustaining practices for the advancement of Black and brown student success.

Julia's interests are guided by a focus on the identity of Black women teachers and students, and their lived experiences across their educational experiences. Generally speaking, her scholarship explores teacher identity and pedagogical practices within rural education contexts. She operates primarily from a Black feminist epistemology with a critical sociocultural framework to engage in critical qualitative research that promotes equity and social justice in rural education teaching and learning. Using culturally sustaining pedagogy as a foundation, Julia's teaching/scholarship allows students to begin to construct, perform, and assess their own knowledge as they engage in critical reflection that challenges them to (re)imagine equitable teaching that may counter their cultural identity and interrogate race and racism. Reconciled cultural identity creates a more liberatory teaching practice that is inclusive of academic freedom for teachers and students. A Black poet scholar, she engages in critical qualitative research that attempts to center the lives and experiences of other Black scholars while also disrupting normative research that doesn't honor the authenticity of the researcher or culturally sustain the community of participants.

Monisha Atkinson obtained her Doctor of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of North Carolina Wilmington. She also has a Master of Arts in Adult Education and Training from the University of Phoenix and a Bachelor of Science in Family and Community Services from East Carolina University. As a Black woman educator, Monisha serves as a courageous champion for Black and brown students, who have historically been marginalized due to a disparity in opportunities. Monisha's major focus as a Black woman educator has centered attention on implementing culturally affirming pedagogy and fostering linguistic justice in learning environments.

Dr. Atkinson's research interests revolve around cultivating a feeling of belonging among Black students in educational settings and promoting linguistic justice. Her schooling as a former student in the Not Yet united states school system has informed her study of linguistic justice. She conducts critical qualitative research focusing on disrupting anti-Blackness in education by drawing on a Black-Crit epistemology and critical sociocultural framework. Monisha's teaching and scholarship are grounded in culturally affirming pedagogy, encouraging students to engage in critical reflection that pushes them to challenge normative instructional practices.

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Notes

1. Here we are overamplifying the ways that practicing Black*Mothering* creates a state of uninterrupted peace and calmness.

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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]

1. 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

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…

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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

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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 naïve; 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.

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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 patriarchical/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 **drama**s, 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.

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*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?

[Maria[2]]

2. A Rape of The Earth: Weaving Sámi Feminist Voices against Mines[3]

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.

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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 Tree[4]

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

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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 gate. 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

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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!

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- 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 décorated 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

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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, *Simaz*,[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 *Tkha*,[12] who created the whole world, or even the patron of the fruit gardens, *Khyateguasha*,[13] or the god of fertility *Sozeris*.

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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

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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

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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-

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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

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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

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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

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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]

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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.

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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.
Coatlicue 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,

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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?

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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]

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6. Resisting the coloniality of power at a Swedish workplace[20]

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

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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?"

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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!

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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

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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

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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]

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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 reworking 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 Knobblock** (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).

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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: Knobblock, 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

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(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 Obuntu 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.

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Living While Fat

Kaitlyn Fortune

Introduction

Having a fat body in a neoliberal society poses many challenges. The physical structures I inhabit—seating, aisles, washrooms—are built for small (unimposing) bodies, bodies that support the functions of a neoliberal system. This is life writing, I explore parallels between fatness and disability within a neoliberal social order. I also explore how the medical-industrial complex and the weight loss industry unite under the umbrella of capitalism to transform fat bodies into perfect consumers of a supposed "cure" within diet culture. The disabled/fat body is made to feel incompatible with the neoliberal model without some kind of "cure," and I seek to disrupt these imperatives. I draw on fat academics and disability theorists (such as Rosemarie Garland Thompson and Eli Clare), who examine fatness using a feminist disability framework to illuminate what fat activists can learn from disability studies and the impact of activism. I rebel against the implication of "cure" for these body-minds.

Understanding the Fat Body

A fat body is interesting to inhabit; it is evident and present and simultaneously relegated to a realm of invisibility. I lived in a fat body for most of my life until the pull of diet culture became overwhelming, and I embarked on an obsession of my own undoing: villainizing food and exalting thinness. I admit that I have commented on other fat people's bodies, affecting their relationships with their own body-minds. But as Selina Thompson writes so succinctly: "Weight loss is not freedom" (2018, 48). I spent years disguised in thinness, seemingly separated from the issues of fatness with which I fought for two decades. But, I remember the sting of being in a big body-mind in a fatphobic world, and that's what once brought me to examine fat activism and fat bodies, even as a straight-sized person.

Two years ago, I was enjoying the "cake" of thin privilege and a realization that I could find peace and freedom with food and my body. I felt untouchable. I entered new fitness pursuits, met many milestones, and completed a graduate degree that extended well beyond its promised timeline. Now, my body-mind is tired. My body-mind is also far more lived in. The sting returns as I navigate

a new world of being midsized. Here, I am liminal: all and yet nothing, too much and not enough for clothing, activism, or representation.

Today I would argue that not only is weight loss not freedom, as Thompson says, but that weight loss is a life sentence. Changing the physical body is *not* freedom from the institutions that villainize fatness. Weight loss is a life sentence of hyper-vigilance around food, of watching steps accumulate, of weighing in, and having weight weigh on the mind. Had I continued in diet culture, I would be sentenced to a life dedicated to monitoring my body: to feel I had failed if it changed without my permission, as if I were in control of all of its biological inner workings. I'm sure there are some who feel I have let myself go.

And I have. I have let myself go to find peace in my body and expand my mind beyond what I was "supposed" to do. I have let myself go in different directions, meet and speak to different people, and forge new paths. Diet culture is not freedom or happiness; it is a life sentence of doubting one's own body-mind, and I am grateful to have set and made bail.

Fat activism may be a recent introduction to the academy, but fat academics have long tried to document the challenges of living in a fat body-mind. More recent writing, like Roxanne Gay's 2018 *Hunger*, explores her body's growth after trauma and the realities of being a fat person of colour. She writes:

> When you're overweight, your body becomes a matter of public record in many respects. … People project assumed narratives onto your body and are not at all interested in the truth of your body, whatever that truth might be. Fat, much like skin color, is something you cannot hide, no matter how dark the clothing you wear, or how diligently you avoid horizontal stripes. (82)

As Gay explains it, the bigger you are, the harder it is to hide and the more desperately you want to. However, this passage by Gay also touches on the intersectionality of big bodies, what it means to be big and black, or perhaps big and disabled, or even big and queer. Is it possible that the oppression of racism or ableism leads a body to become bigger? Or that the fear of a fat body becomes extricated in society because of race or disability?[1] In writing about fatness, theorists must contend with the fact that a fat white body experiences the world much differently than a body also experiencing other factors of oppression. I cannot speak as a fat man or a non-binary individual, but being a fat woman affected my femininity and womanhood in every way imaginable. I often wonder if that is why, post weight loss, I presented as decidedly less feminine than I had before. Was it because, in my smaller body, I felt innately more feminine in shape (read: frail), no matter how I chose to dress? I am outraged that size and gender expression seem inextricably related.

The negative impact of fatness reaches far beyond trying to hide in nondescript clothing. Still, nondescript clothing can be next to impossible to find, let alone from companies that are ethical, local, and within budget. The lack of access to clothing is oppression and erasure for fat women and AFAB (Assigned Female At Birth) individuals. Gay writes about her struggle finding

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clothes in her size, often not finding stores that carry anything larger than a size 28. I know firsthand that a size 30 is beyond the purview of a fatphobic society. My size (18/20) is already outside the realm of possibility for meaningful fashion; that is, fashion that sparks joy, fills needs, or represents the wearer. Clothing is about more than fit; for those with straight-sized bodies, it is an outward expression of personality. Unbeknownst to consumers, the fashion industry has discovered those beyond a size 14 are clothed by the ether, not the designer.

Size 30 bodies deserve clothing: nice, beautiful, ethically made clothing. But realistically, we must address the stigma emerging at size 14, and likely into size 10 and 12, before we see sizes 30+ be given the time and respect they deserve. Fatness is posited as a social ill for all bodies; that is why thin women are not free from the effects of dieting and restriction. Fat is seen as beastly, problematic, unnatural, wrong. Gay puts beautifully what my soul felt as I shopped in my teens. To want beautiful clothes may seem silly, and yet "these are trivial wants but they aren't" (2018, 119).

My research brought me to grapple with the liminal space of the "midsized" body. The body I inhabit today occupies a middle space in which nothing is truly made to fit my sized body. The stigma of the *changing and re-shaping* female body is one that I had not been previously confronted with. This need to be clothed is not a trivial need for me at all. I've had this conversation with women of all sizes. These clothes are not made for us, we say. We yell this into the marketplace, and no one answers. So we buy someone else's clothes and go home.

Today I write in a frilly pink polka dot dress. It is fuchsia, matching the vagina-shaped earrings I wear that confuse my mother and to gain respect from the women I want to emulate as I grow up. My hair is pink, fading with the sun, and braided in two milkmaid braids. I have long fingernails. I feel silly in an effervescent way. I have found more femininity than ever before. It suits me. While I am larger now, I am far less certain that my gender expression and size are related and probably more convinced that my self is pink, sparkly, silly, and loud and that the earlier me was not yet enough of my true self to bask in the joy of those things.

The Rebellion of Fatness

The fat body becomes the docile body when fat individuals begin to internalize moralizing narratives of body size. Fat individuals who outwardly show love for their bodies do so as an active rebellion against sociocultural ideals of health and bodies. Susan Bordo (1997) discusses society's propensity towards limiting women through diagnosis, most prominently through Hysteria, Agoraphobia, and Anorexia. I would add Body Dysmorphia and Bulimia to that list, but also the term "morbid obesity." The central unifying factor of these diagnoses is (gendered) bodily control. The diagnosis of fat as near-death limits the female body, looking only at the physical form and neither at the environmental factors influencing it, nor the individual residing inside of it.

In Eli Clare's *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure*, he briefly addresses Michel Foucault's "docile bodies" concerning the female body. Clare writes, "female bodies become docile bodies—bodies whose forces and energies are

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habituated to eternal regulation, subjection, transformation, 'improvement' " (2017, 91). Clare's writing moves me to write. His style is effervescent in how it arrives in my mind and bubbles against my own ideas. I rarely begin to write without first considering his writing style and absolute refusal to sacrifice artistry within academic writing. I want to write honestly and yet in a style protected from the harsh confines of academic shoulds and shouldn'ts. Clare becomes my strength to forge projects that allow my voice its space without disingenuous anxieties of using and manipulating stylistic differences.

I resonate deeply with Clare's reading of the female body and its connection to the fat body. Fat bodies are only acceptable when trying to change, shrink, and "improve," as Clare notes. Fat bodies are not acceptable when they exist without external regulation. Not to say that the small female body is not subjected to societal expectations, comments, and pressures. But the fat body occupies a unique space where it is rebellion when it remains static without apology.

A Fat Understanding of Disability

While there are many similarities between fat studies and disability studies, it is crucial not to co-opt disabled experiences for fat activism's gain. However, I use principles of feminist disability studies to understand experiences of fatness, while being careful to honour the origins of the theory. The social constructivist method understands disability not as a biological error but as an issue within a society that fails to accept and make space accessible for differently-abled individuals. Garland-Thompson explains a social constructivist view of disability as "a system of representation that marks bodies as subordinate, rather than an essential property of bodies that supposedly have something wrong with them" (2005, 1557-58). Employing the social constructivist theory for disability pushes me to ask: who gets to decide normal? Who gets to determine what bodies are "right" and which are relegated to the other? What weight is "normal," and for whom? What constitutes "over" (weight) that isn't arbitrary or, as was the case historically regarding insurance brokers, tied to capitalist restriction/gain?[2] The social constructivist model of disability allows for an understanding of seating as simply too small, of aisles as too narrow, and of washroom stalls as too tight to allow for more people per square inch rather than bodies that are "too" big.

Translating this line of knowledge onto fat bodies, the issue becomes not the fat bodies themselves but a society that deems them inferior. The issue becomes the airplane seats being extraordinarily small (to maximize profit) and not the large body that cannot occupy them. The issue becomes clothing manufacturers who, in search of elitism, refuse to make clothing big enough for even medium-sized bodies. The "problem" becomes a society that misconstrues "fat" as "ugly" and not a fat person's ability to give or receive love. Using a feminist disability lens allows a focus away from the individual and onto a society that is only built to support one body and refuses to acknowledge the faults in its system.

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Some disability theorists include fat bodies under the umbrella of disabled bodies. At first, this inclusion confused me. Is the fat body really disabled when it can temporarily change through weight loss? And yet, with social constructivism, the fat body is disabled by a society that is neither structured nor productive for fat bodies. Garland-Thompson writes, "the fat body is disabled because it is discriminated against in two ways: first, fat bodies are subordinated by a built environment that excludes them; second, fat bodies are seen as unfortunate and contemptible" (1582).

Relatedly Clare is deeply engaged in understanding the impact of "cure." He is interested in how "cures" impact disabled folks and what cure—as a tangible concept—says about how society views disability. Part of his understanding of cure lies in diagnosis. What I found most gripping about *Brilliant Imperfection* is that he does not claim to have all the answers but instead, grapples, allows the ideas to "jostle" him and he still paints a detailed picture of the world he inhabits as a disabled, gender-queer person: "in spite of what the medical-industrial complex tells us, diagnosis is a tool rather than a fact, an action rather than a state of being, one story among many" (2017, 45). Through his personal experiences, he urges readers to question the real purpose of diagnosis, what diagnosis means, and the benefits that might exist if we ignore the expectations that accompany it. Since reading Clare, I have begun to see the world differently, questioning whether how I exist within it is typical or if I have adapted to suit a world that isn't built for me.

My graduate work brought me even further into understanding the realities of navigating medical spaces while inhabiting a fat body-mind. There is no hiding fatness from doctors or strangers on the street. There is certainly no hiding it from oneself. Many people claim they are "trying to help" by announcing and then quickly denouncing a person's fatness as if this were a revelation, new knowledge that would transform the fat body instantly into one that does not face stigma and marginalization. The diagnosis of fat becomes a means of control and also a way for non-fat individuals to place their displeasure onto the site of that particular fat body. In this way, weight loss becomes a cure. While Clare means diagnosis in the sense of medical labels and processes, I think it is critical to consider diagnosis as social as well as medical. For now, as my body grows larger than it has been, and while I wear clothing that brushes against plus size, I have not yet been socially re-diagnosed as fat. According to the jury of my peers I must not be as immediately in need of "cure," weight loss, for when they were invested in a cure, they were sure to inform me.

I want to repair a gap I should have addressed earlier. While theorists Mairs (1997) and Clare (2017) question diagnoses' usefulness in the context of disability, I denounce the usefulness of diagnoses in relation to fat bodies as it only seeks to control and reduce the individual to their body. As research states, intentional weight loss is, in fact, never helpful for health-related quality of life.[3] While other diagnoses may be a necessary step towards treatment, the fat body cannot access or benefit from "cure" and, perhaps most importantly, is only reminded of public opinion that deems their body a body in error.

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The Capitalist "Cure"

While the neoliberal state disdains the fat body, capitalism loves the money it can produce. Diet fads produce the most amazing money gougers. Companies like Sarah's Discovery utilize ketone pills and apple cider vinegar; Beach Body creates expensive meal replacement shakes and small portion size containers to accompany their fitness videos; diet clinics claim the cure for the scourge of fatness as disease. The weight loss industry is so successful because a dieting body is never finished. As Thompson states, "I would go even further and say that the fat dieting body is not only the perfect consumer body, it also becomes the perfect advertisement—as a success story when weight is lost and a cautionary tale when it is not" (2018, 44). This plays into a politics of recognition for fat bodies, only visible in the media when used to market the cure for fatness. What effect does this have on how society treats fat people? I see a connection between the "before" photos that garner massive responses to ingest diet pills and the fear that relegates the fat body as unruly or wrong. What is scary about fat? Is it the fat itself, or do thin people see the sting of stigma around fatness and already recognize it as socially debilitating? The fear then attaches itself not to the body-mind but to a society that callously discards bodies that do not serve their purpose.

How do we become so perfectly indoctrinated into the collective fear of fat? At what age do we forsake bodily joy for constant monitoring and external regulation? Even though there have been studies presenting the risk of bariatric surgeries, thousands are performed every year. Despite the science that diet pills are, at best, ineffective symbols of desperation, countless women and men continue to consume them year after year. Although plastic surgeons are not directly related to weight loss, they are still beneficiaries of the hundreds of thousands of dollars from the weight loss industry. Clare writes, "the quest for slenderness, for an eradication of fatness, is seemingly worth all the failures, dangers, dubious medical procedures and direct harm" (2017, 77). The fat body represents the unruly, yes, but it also largely represents the inevitability of the changing body. All bodies change. For a society that predicates so much on a normative standard of beauty and a normative standard of the neoliberal worker, the fat and disabled body are feared because they are real. Fat is scary because the social stigma that accompanies fatness, which we all in some way contribute to, is not far away. No one wants to be socially ostracized, and yet that fear works to uphold the fatphobia and oppression of disabled and fat individuals.

In Clare's discussion, I believe there is an underlying concern for the erasure of individuality associated with cure. In a neoliberal society that values bodies that fuel the capitalist machine, both disabled and fat bodies fail to meet the standard of production. Cure strikes me as produced out of fear: fear of what is different and unknown. For that reason, I see the rejection of cure as a rebellion against the neoliberal system. I wish I had been able to participate in that rebellion, as well. I bought the lies of the medical-industrial complex and a society that told me I was "wrong." This is why I push this rebellion for others.

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Cure also has a way of pushing a monoculture of human beings. Why should everyone have to function in the same way? Why should all bodies look the same? Even with cure, we know that bodies come in various sizes, shapes, and abilities. For cure to thrive, the diagnosis of "troubled" or "wrong" has to precede treatment. Thompson states the struggle of weight loss is "exhausting. It's maddening. It leaves one enraged" (2018, 44). It is exhausting to be expected to change. It is maddening that bodies cannot exist as they are. It leaves me enraged that our society feels the need to change any "unruly" body. I'm enraged at more than just a social need to (re)shape and control. I'm enraged at the *thousands* of hours I spent starving, sprinting, obsessing to find the "thin" at the end of the tunnel. I'm maddened at how well I bought their lies. I'm enraged that I fed the capitalist machine of diet culture not only my money but new customers. Every post and subsequent praise for my body pushed more divergent bodies like mine into a never-ending cycle of diet, crash, guilt, and repeat. They turned to me for inspiration, and I am maddened that I have no way to tell all of them that I am so sorry. I am so sorry that I brought you into the madhouse with me.

What are the consequences of comparing fat bodies' experience with disabled experience? Disability theorists have long fought to have their struggles and their personhood recognized by society. Co-opting their experience for the furthering of fat activism's cause is problematic. But with academics like Garland-Thompson including fat bodies under the umbrella of disability, the line of what constitutes disability begins to blur or expand. Are there consequences for calling a fat body disabled? If any, I think the implications would be social. Socially, is it worse to be considered disabled or fat? Does this stigma compound if you are both? Does it instead lighten societal expectations? In my view, labeling the fat body-mind disabled is, in effect, calling out the impact of bodily control and marginalization imposed by society, and while it may be a label which is disheartening, what should be more so is the lived realities of individuals rendered superfluous by the system that should support them. The stigma of being labeled disabled, or the issue of expanding the disability beyond the traditional, becomes the concern. There is so much theory and understanding of "ill-fitting" body-minds that fat activists could learn from disability theorists. However, is there a difference between bodies that could be forcibly changed but do not want to and bodies that cannot change and perhaps want to? As Clare would say, "I ask because I don't know the answers" (2017, 87).

I have had to grapple with why I worried about conflating fatness and disability. Initially, I knew it was because I was told, "Don't co-opt disability theory in your work! Don't conflate the two in your attempt to merge ideas!" But I know it stems beyond that. I know that there was more fear buried beneath my resistance to name the fat body-mind as a disabled body-mind. Both of those words, "fat" and "disabled," carry with them a history of hurt. Not only socially but from my lived experience, those words lay heavy on my mind and reside deep in my body. It is a recent revelation that I claim the word disabled, knowing now that I am an autistic woman and that my lived experience, diagnosed or not, is worthy of the accommodation and acknowledgement I am deprived

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of. I am/have been/may be, fat and disabled. But in 2020, when I started writing about these ideas, both words were distant and terrifying. I was an avid dieter who relished the distance she had put between her body and fatness. ADHD felt socially less of a disability and more of a personality trait. I felt the guise of privilege from both terms. To have conflated fatness and disability, or to have acknowledged their shared experience back then, would have been to have connected with my former body-mind. To have acknowledged that my present and past states were one and the same. It would have been beyond my mind's capacity, having been drained by my needs as a dieter. It would have crushed me.

Writing about this remains challenging. I am proud of my work to accept my body-mind as ever-changing, fluid. I feel most seen in an understanding of the fat body as disabled because I am both always; my mind and my body are divergent. This theory is no longer terrifying but connective, linking my thoughts and fears spanning years of my young life. It is liberatory.

Claiming Fatness

Living unapologetically as fat is rebellion: a rebellion from the normative standards of beauty, a stance against what a "working body" should look like, and a big Fuck You to the negative comments spewed on fat bodies. Just like there have been 20 years of writing on the experiences of stigma and shame faced by fat people, there is a newly emergent body of writing on loving the fat body just the way it is. Sonya Renee Taylor encourages women to examine the origins of their body shame to free themselves of that hatred. She advocates for radical self-love, which she describes as "a port far beyond the isle of self-acceptance," working from activist Angela Davis' famous declaration to "change the things I cannot accept" (2-3). Or theorists like Selina Thompson who writes, "Your body is your own—let it be chaos, let it be anarchy, let it be animal, let it be you. Know that this is a radical act, an act of pure feminism. Know that your agency and power are always in dialogue with each other" (2018, 49). Thompson's "radical act" is the same concept as my rebellion; it is the audacity to exist as a fat body. But this concept is not without fear or worry. I am not talking about an easy rebellion but, like Taylor and Thompson state, one that is truly radical to current conceptions of bodies. Difficult, but worth it, to protect the validity of fat bodies.

This rebellion comes in the smallest acts. It happens every single time a fat body-mind silences the conditioning of society saying they are unworthy of love and unwanted as they are. I still struggle with this today, even though I am no longer classed as a fat body. I still have fat on my body, but I seem to have shrunk enough to convince people it does not exist. I chuckle at how simple this fear of fat is. We all have fat, we eat fat, and some of us are/were fat, yet socially, it is a black death.

But it is not the fat we fear. Like all marginalization, those who experience the privilege of freedom from stigmatization do so with the knowledge that others are treated worse. The fear of being othered pushes the fear of the fat itself. Those closest to the pinnacle of body power and privilege have the most to lose from the disentanglement of worth and body weight. What will dinner

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conversation become when white women no longer define their social value in relation to their Pilates-yoga-CrossFit-running-swimming-stretching-walking dedication? To rejecting the "bad" body that sits in peacefulness rather than constant movement?[4] What might change if we re-imagined movement as for the soul rather than the body? How might we then change our relationships to our own body-minds?

Fat activism, like disability activism, is another step towards allowing all lives to matter and for all body-minds to be given the ability to live freely. I wish that fat activism was a term I had heard growing up, but it was not. I wish that my mother's yearbooks hadn't been filled with nasty comments about her body, but they were. I wish that hadn't sparked an intergenerational fatphobic cycle, but it did. As I see it, I can wish all I want, but just as "hope" and "cure" aren't the same, neither are "wish" and "change." If I want to see a world in which all body-minds are valued, I have to change how I talk about bodies. Like many others, I am guilty of prolonging the legacy of fatphobia. As Heather McAlister writes, "We will never have our freedom if we only live 'from the neck up.' Yet that is the way many fat people live, even, or especially, the activists and academics among us" (2009, 311). As I write this, I know I am guilty of stalling progress. I know that I lived 20 years "from the neck up" and accepted that as my penance for being fat. Every single person deserves to be more than a face to ease the discomfort of others. Everyone should be able to live boldly and loudly, in full body-minds, in all their complexities and differences.

Conclusion

Fat activism can benefit from feminist disability studies if academics remember that the experiences of fat bodies, while similar to disabled bodies, do not encompass the full reality of disability as fat alone. It is essential to respect the origins of theory when applying it to other areas of study to protect the sanctity of the hard work required to build it. Fat activism is a relatively new area of study compared to disability theory. To co-opt disability theory would be to forget the years of struggle, policy, and projects that went into making disability theory what it is today.

Exploring the struggles of being a fat body-mind allows theorists of all sizes to understand the social stigma attached to being a deviant body. Fat activism is, after all, very similar to feminism in that it is for the benefit of all bodies, not just those who are fat. When fat body-minds are uplifted and respected, then the dialogue around bodies of all kinds, including disabled bodies, and those that are always both can change. Fat activism is for more than just those bodies that are only represented in the "before" photos of weight loss ads. It is for bodies too big for "one size fits all stores" and even for skinny bodies that hear "fat" as a promise of death. When the dialogue about what bodies are acceptable changes, then the creation of spaces accessible to more than just small bodies can begin, and the *radical* self-love that Taylor (2020) promises in her writing can be unlocked.

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Biography

Kaitlyn Fortune is a PhD student in Sociology at the Memorial University of Newfoundland. Her research is deeply influenced by Gender Studies, and she engages extensively with both disciplines. Kaitlyn recently completed her MA in Sociology, where she studied the effects of weight stigma on young women during COVID-19, with a focus on how TikTok mitigated that relationship. Her current areas of interest are fat studies, embodiment, stigma, marginalization, affect, sex work, and kink. She hopes to study fat women in kink and sex work during her PhD, engaging in autoethnographic writing and creative nonfiction to complement the affective work innate to the communities she wishes to study. Kaitlyn hopes to pursue a career in academia and is looking forward to the next chapter of her journey.

Notes

1. Sabrina Strings' 2019 *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia* explains that the fear of the fat body originated in its proximity to the black body that was seen to be "savage," large, and unrefined. The fat/black body became the antithesis of white beauty.
2. Strings (2019) attributes the definition of a "normal" or "healthy" weight to the insurance industry that sought to categorize whom they would be willing to insure. The medical field later adopted this definition as a tool for doctors to decide which patients they would be willing to take into their practice.
3. See Guardabassi, Mirisola, & Tomasetto (2018); Hunger, Smith, & Tomiyama (2020); Hunger, Major, Blodorn, & Miller (2015); and Tomiyama et al. (2018).
4. In their article "A Decolonial Feminist Epistemology of the Bed: A Compendium Incomplete of Sick and Disabled Queer Brown Femme Bodies of Knowledge" (2020), Khanmalek and Rhodes discuss the redistribution of rest. They put the racial and class-based relationships to rest. Their theory illuminates the relationship between a peaceful, unchanging fat body and the capitalist forces that require and desire its near-constant movement.

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Artist's Statement: Woven Prayers on Melting Ice – Walking the Retreats of Glaciers

Sarah Joy Stoker

https://www.janusunbound.com/media/woven-prayers-on-melting-ice-k8ab2

In April 2023 I was part of The Arctic Circle Residency for Art and Science. A self-directed residence sailing aboard the tall ship *Antigua*, the two-week journey led us to some of the most isolated areas in the high Arctic, navigating around the west coast of Svalbard to reach beyond 80 degrees latitude, nearing the North Pole. We were a group of 28 artists, two scientists, four Arctic guides, the captain and his three crew, the cook and his three crew: totalling 42 people. We saw two polar bears from a great distance, not visible with the naked eye, about eight walrus, dozens of beautiful curious seals, hundreds of wild and extraordinary sea birds, and the most incredible and beautiful land, sea, and skyscapes I have seen in my life.

My intention was to put myself in this environment, incredible, and "untouched," and exactly not somewhere that we (humans) should be. I brought materials and objects into the environments with me that, along with the humans, were clearly things that should not be found there. A fire hot red weave created for the project by my sister Stephanie Stoker, older weaves made by her from industrial fishing lines, and various examples of plastics.

As we are all too well aware, the Arctic is vital and has long been a barometer for the measurement of global climate change, higher average temperatures, wildfires at ever-higher latitudes, permafrost loss, reduced ice coverage of the Arctic Ocean, rapidly receding glaciers and the melting ice sheets. Longyearbyen, the northern most settlement in the world and the location of the airport to travel to Svalbard, has seen its year-round temperatures rise four degrees Celsius, five times faster than the global average, and winter temps have jumped a full seven degrees in the past half century. And as I write this, against massive protest from activists, scientists, fisheries, and the international community, Norway has just announced plans to allow deep sea mining off the west coast of Svalbard, near where these images and video were captured. This will be devastating.

This work is an alert, a call for extreme caution and mobilization for a fundamental shift in how we live on this planet. An alarm, a warning, a distress call,

an EMERGENCY – the red weave is blood, life, mothers, passion, hearts, anger, grief, violence, despair, urgency. The fishing line and darker weaves speak to transformation, the dark and sickly forced changing of environments and ecologies. The degradation and mutation of life and form and shapes that we know and knew, the devastation of the world that supports us and the knowledge that it is because of us. They are creatures of death and grief, and monsters of mourning born of our modern world and our behaviour in it. Making and showing this work is an act of hope. A complete rejection of imperial colonialism, raging blind capitalism, entitlement, arrogance, and violence. It is an act of, and call for, the most extreme reverence, the most profound love, and the deepest grief.

Biography

Deeply preoccupied by and committed to ecological health and justice, I am an interdisciplinary artist whose work is rooted in dance, performance, and installation. I acknowledge with the most profound respect and gratitude those that were here first: the people, land, water, and animals of the unceded ancestral homeland of the Beothuk, Mi'kmaq, Innu, and Inuit territories on this, Ktaqmkuk (Newfoundland, and Labrador), where I live and work.

I am deeply affected by what continues to happen to and in this world due to such a dramatic disconnect from nature fuelled by our colonial past and present. For three decades my work has been an expression of grief and a reaction to the destruction, injustice, greed, excess, insatiable want for more and the complacency and apathy that are epidemic. As we find ourselves in the free fall of the world's ecological, climate and extinction crisis, I work, hoping to instigate reflection, introspection, and aggressive mobilization for change, hoping to facilitate commonality of thoughtful and sympathetic sentiment and processing around this pivotal period in our world and communities.

My practice lives in the realms of contemporary dance, interdisciplinary performance, and installation. From *They cut down trees so you can wipe your ass and blow your nose with the softest tissues ever* (1999), *Je ne peux pas* (2001), *B* (2002), *From your head down to your feet* (2003), *Le bordel* (2003), *Rocks on* (2005), *Sapiens lay here* (2007), *When the birds fly happy* (2011), *The worth of* (2014), to *Our heart breaks* (2018), *Once we were trees* (2019), *Fort/tress* (2020), *Walking the Retreats of Glaciers*, and *Woven Prayers on Melting Ice* (2023). I believe art is an active force in life and should be used as a vehicle for action, engagement, and provocation. My most recent work comes from time spent in the Arctic Circle in April 2023, navigating the west coast of Svalbard aboard the tall ship *Antigua* as part of the Arctic Circle Residency. gutsink.nf.ca.

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(Mis)Believing Women: Genre Classification, Metaphor, and Consent in Contemporary Female-Identified Authorship

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Abstract

With a consideration of the function of metaphor and the recently-popularized hybrid narrative modes, this paper delves into the theme of consent in relation to female-authored fictional texts written in the wake of the #MeToo movement, focusing on Kristen Roupenian's short story "Cat Person" as a case study. Central to the critical reception of Roupenian's story are many discourses, whose authors conflate Roupenian with the female-identified character in her story, that disregard the story as fiction despite its genre classification. I explore how the acknowledgement of author as artist and the politics of consent are necessary for readerships who don't want to further oppress female-identified authorial voices.

Key words: Autofiction, "Cat Person," Consent, Female Authorship, Fiction, Genre Classification, Metaphor, Women Writers

Introduction

A strange phenomenon is occurring: overtly fictional and female-authored texts are frequently becoming subject to often heated and abusive debates that conflate character/narrator with writer. Such literary blurring of fact and fiction is understandable in forms such as autofiction and fictocriticism, but the phenomenon creates new questions and obstacles for female-identified writers who, in fact, want to keep themselves separate from the lives of their characters. Equally disturbing, the trend also perpetuates the ever-distressing misbelief of women and women's stories. As a creative writer and scholar, my own interest in this topic is personal; I've experienced countless instances, when asked about a work of fiction I've authored, where well-intentioned interviewers and readers have assumed details to be autobiographical fact instead of overt narrative construction. While one or two instances of such conflation could be considered annoying at worst, these assumptions—which I've seen abound in other contemporary female-identified writers—are partic-

ularly insidious in a time when women (especially as victims and survivors) are telling the true, difficult stories of their lives, only to have the validity of those non-fictional narratives questioned on the public stage. The irony of this inversion is not lost on me; why, I ask, are our stories being taken as fact when—in at least one specific instance—we demand they be seen as fiction?

Consent is key. If an author publishes fiction, readers need to find it in themselves to respect this genre classification. I wonder whether the desire some readers have to conflate the personal lives of authors with their fictional writings has something to do with a desire for power; sanctimonious positions are easier to uphold when these lines are blurred, allowing non-consenting readers to take the moral high ground by mistaking craft (the development of character, for example) with personal flaw (the actual interiority of author). What follows is a reflection on the #MeToo movement and its relationship to readerly consent, with a specific consideration of Kristen Roupenian's short story "Cat Person," the critical reception of which instantiates the kinds of problematic discourses that can arise when this form of consent is overlooked. I also consider the insidious heteropatriarchal power tactics of language cooption aimed at invalidating the agency of women-identifying subjects by rhetorically minimizing the role of metaphor in stories and clouding distinctions between fiction and hybrid narrative. I suggest that one way in which disempowerment through misperception might be avoided is through an open, considerate approach that allows readers to take stock of *author as artist*, rather than assuming authors are their protagonists. I attempt to get at the heart of why readers seem to increasingly crave an intimate lens into female authors' personal lives as the key to understanding meaning in their narratives, and I explore lateral possibilities for authorial agency within oppressive contexts.

Context: #MeToo and Metaphor

It is important to consider the possibilities of language cooption under the heteropatriarchal and capitalist frameworks that have never been more threatened than in the wake of #MeToo, the social movement that brought predominantly female victim narratives to the foreground and offered them, in the most impactful cases, more socially-perceived validity than ever before. Further, the complications of language use in the literary world are acute in the case of metaphor. Linda Berger's essay, "The Lady, or the Tiger? A Field Guide to Metaphor and Narrative" is a helpful guide to the function of metaphor in all of its generative confusion, recalling that, without the "metaphorical process that allows us to gather [things] up, group them together, and contain them, our perceptions would scatter like marbles thrown at the ground" (2011, 275). People need metaphor for context—that gathering, grouping, and containing—not only for context within the singularity of experience, but also as a tool for empathy, allowing individuals to see their lives in relation to those of others, to experience the comfort of similarity alongside the awe-inspiring symbolism of difference in the same moment. A complicating factor is the necessary opacity of metaphor: a fertile ground for possible misinterpretation in the readerly moment. As Berger notes, the metaphorical space "invites the reader to fill in

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the blanks" and to offer predictions on the ending based on "what we already know rather than what the story reveals" (276). Within the specific context of consent culture, the very opacity needed for metaphor can be dangerous in terms of victim narratives. Who is filling in the blanks, and how? In this moment when oppressive power structures repeatedly challenge the believability and authenticity of female-written narratives, and given that empathy is often made possible through metaphor, the boundary between metaphor's ability to enable empathy across difference and to promote obfuscating opacity, creates problems.

#MeToo conversations have revealed that the idea of interpretation can also be a threat. For example, in cases where male-identified persons have mistakenly interpreted ambivalence or unspoken resistance as a sexual "green light" from predominantly female-identified subjects. In the realm of fiction and metaphor, questions arise: Is the opacity needed for metaphorical interpretation something that can be weaponized against victims, as it relies on a logic that prioritizes not *mis*-direction per se, but *in*-direction, for its efficacy? How much trust must readers grant writers to tell stories authentically given their own experiences? When is it responsible to allow the singular to speak for the universal and vice versa? A robust discussion about identity politics in relation to narrative is a topic that can't be fully explored here, but it is one that's important to keep in mind while contemplating metaphor and narrative in autofiction and fictocriticism, forms that depend, in part, on the recognized limitations of linear fictional narrative to convey contradictory realities and complicated truths.

Callback: Lorde and the Master's Toolbox

I turn to two of Audre Lorde's essays in *Sister Outsider*, first published in 1984, to consider the threat that autofiction and fictocriticism pose to oppressive power structures. The worst-case scenario for misunderstanding fiction as nonfiction/fact can arguably be traced back to the threat of writing forms that promote personal truth through fragmentation, discursion, and narrative realism. In "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," Lorde reminds readers of patriarchal usurpation of language (at the level of definition) to stigmatize oppressed subjects. In "Age, Race, Class, and Sex," she emphasizes the fact that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," and that one must move laterally in attempts to reclaim oppressed voices at the level of language and narrative. Lorde starts by arguing that oppressive forces of power work to "corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change" (1984, 53), and goes on to argue that the notion of the erotic was altered from an embodied, energizing, and spiritual female resource "firmly rooted in unexpressed or unrecognized feeling," to one that dredges up societal connections to pornography (objectification of the female-identified subject), and shame (a self-denying emotion that prioritizes the obfuscation of desire) (52-55). Lorde reminds us of the difficult fact that, historically, sexist and racist status-quo power structures willingly disseminate misinformation on the level of the word and its etymology in ways

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that quickly become so ubiquitous that they often evade the scrutiny of public skepticism.

The "big picture problem" that Lorde illustrates is relevant today and autofiction and fictocriticism embody its issues, as they are both "highly individual, anecdotal form[s] of writing" that often hybridize literary forms moving in a non-linear fashion "between positions" and refusing "an ordered account" (Pearl 2019, 163). Autofiction finds some of its roots in *écriture* feminine, a strand of feminist theory that originated in France in the early 1970s, where writers including Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray, among others, interwove the personal and the political, using a "mix of registers to convey the phenomenology of the lived female experience," and seeking to "expose binarism and patriarchy by juxtaposing multiple ways of speaking in a singular text" (164). By rejecting linearity, the lateral and fragmented attempts at truth-telling inherent in autofictional and fictocritical texts reflect instances where writers are able to reveal many truths at once, which challenges "either/or" binaries in writing and, as a result, makes it harder for hetero-patriarchal voices to easily usurp and rewrite these ideas to their own benefit. In "Age, Race, Class, and Sex," Lorde returns again to their oft-stated thesis regarding the master's toolbox, and ends the essay with an unpublished poem, arguing how it's important to recognize difference by not conflating experience across identity politics and by figuring out how to relate through an acknowledgement of difference that promotes a form of non-essentializing inclusion. 40 years after the publication of Lorde's essays, in a time where literary forms have been blown wide open and often confused for one another, one might ask how the "master's toolbox" agenda is also working insidiously against the growing agency of oppressed voices today.

Particularly with the advent of #MeToo, a disavowal of moral complexity within female narratives has been undermined by oppressive forces in ways that negatively impact both non-fictional victim narratives and literary works by female-identified writers alike. Consider the lack of trauma-informed negotiations when victims of sexual assault are brought to the stand and asked to relate in perfect detail a series of harrowing lived experiences, oftentimes invalidated when instances of gas lighting undermine a victim's confidence in their own memories, and the subsequent difficulty presented to a speaker to clearly move lived experience into the realm of public narrative when cause and effect are not always rhetorical moves that are readily available to a subject who has undergone unjust and irrational abuse. In many such cases, the possibility for moral complexity is lost. Victimized subjects, often women, are expected not only to convey relatable (and thus empathy-promoting) truths in order to relate injustices enacted against them, but are also expected to be fully "reliable narrators" in the conservative literary sense: void of moral complexity or ambiguity. This rhetorical expectation has complicated the way people read and consider female-conveyed narratives in ways that reveal assumptions that are deeply damaging to female-identified voices in a number of ways, including the collapse of metaphorical validity. As Zach Pearl argues, the advent of autofiction and fictocriticism has partially inverted the logic of metaphor as "the

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personal and the anecdotal are elevated as legitimate rhetorical modes that contend with objective and collective stances" (163). Metaphor, for all of its opaque capacity, has no place in validating real victim narratives, and yet it often plays an important role in literary narrative. Perhaps this difficulty can help pave the way towards an understanding of the strange phenomenon that is currently playing out in the literary world, where a collapse between fiction, non-fiction, and anything in between, is causing such heated debates amongst readers, and garnering strange and loaded attention on social media platforms, where readers have been equating predominantly assumed experiences of female authors to those of their fictional protagonists to a troubling degree that is, quite frankly, weird and unsettling.

Kristen Roupenian's "Cat Person": A Case of Conflated Fact and Fiction

Conflating a character with an author in literary works is not new. One can trace this tendency back to the beginnings of documented female authorship in canonical Western literature. Reflections on Greek poet Sappho's poetry fragments as direct instances of autobiography are one example. Most people I know haven't actually read Sappho, but they have read clickbait articles with titles like "How Gay was Sappho?" that reference her poetry as evidence in an attempt to answer this question. Scholar Judith P. Hallett reflects on this misguided approach noting that "[r]ecent scholars even assume that Sappho's homosexuality is an ascertained, or at least ascertainable, fact and try to come to terms with her homoeroticism instead of analyzing and appreciating her poetry" (1979, 125). It is troubling how such conflations between writer—as craftsperson capable of structuring a narrative voice—and writer as opaque memoirist abound in scholarship and often eclipse the artistic merit of a given work. Now, this conflation is being *weaponized* against women writers under the guise of moral imperative. Jessica Winter outlines that this double bind is further problematized by the threat of appropriation. "If she is forced to confirm that her material is autobiographical," Winter argues, "then she risks forfeiting both the privacy and the power of transfiguration that fiction promises. If she denies it, then she surrenders a badge of authenticity that she may never have wished to claim in the first place, and lays herself open to accusations that she is appropriating the pain of others" (2021, 1). Expectations of authors in such cases point to a standard that, at best, misdirects readers from the literary merit of the author's work and, at worst, sets up an impossible double bind for these writers.

As a creative writer, reader, and English professor, my interest in the conflation of fact and fiction in creative writing is complex and dates back to before the publication of Roupenian's "Cat Person," which sparked such a strange series of obsessive debates surrounding Roupenian's personal life. As an anecdotal aside, the first poetry competition I ever won was one where (at age 10) I fictionalized a difficult homelife situation in a poem and had to read the poem to a room full of people. The purpose of the assignment was to promote the importance of a shelter for women and children in need by having students

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write about contexts where such a shelter might be needed (a now-problematic scenario that seemed pretty standard in the 90s). And so, my deranged little aspiring-writer mind went to work inventing a fictional scenario, whereas I personally had nothing in the way of experience with which to speak, having grown up in a very safe and stable home with deeply supportive and gentle parents. My three-page long poem, which detailed the experience of a child with a dangerous and alcoholic father, won the competition, to my parents' deep chagrin. This was my first experience of a troubling misunderstanding, where many adults tried to take me aside to see if I was okay at home. I didn't understand what they were getting on with, given the nature of the poetry competition, and wish I could have anticipated then that any future writing I did would garner this same sort of brow-furrowed attention, even when most things I'd written clearly resided in the genre of fiction or poetry. These misunderstandings continued to happen in grad school and elsewhere, and seemed to be happening to several of my female-identified writer friends; whereas they seldom came up with any of my male writer friends, and people generally seemed to care less whether those men were writing their own truths or spinning full-formed fictions. It felt gendered, and intrusive, and off-putting as if, as a writer, I was being objectified in some way, put on display, to reveal myself in ways that seemed unnecessary to the thing I was making. I felt the contours of this double standard, but otherwise didn't have much to say about it for a long time.

When "Cat Person" was published in *The New Yorker* in 2017, the heights of this problematic and unwarranted coalescence of fact and fiction had never been more obvious. Not only was this story, which details a problematic and difficult courtship between a young university student named Margot and her older suitor Robert, anomalous because Roupenian wasn't yet an established name in the literary world, but also it seemed to encapsulate one of the first instances of #MeToo literature, where Roupenian deals with the theme of consent in a realistic, confusing way from the perspective of young Margot in real time. Roupenian uses narrative realism to convey Margot's often ambivalent thoughts, not with the authority of hindsight, as is often deployed in narrative, but in uncomfortable, moment-to-moment, shifting detail. The story starts with an encounter where Robert asks Margot out while she's working concession at a movie theatre and, although her initial perception of him is hardly romantic, she agrees. After a couple of weeks of texting back and forth leading up to the date, the two go out. While on the date, Margot moves between anxieties that Robert might be a serial killer, to moments of tenderness where she feels drawn to him, to instances of overt disgust where she makes up an imaginary future boyfriend in her head with whom she takes comfort in laughing at the absurdity of her date with Robert. She soon learns Robert is 14-years her senior, that he is insecure and takes it out on her in small but notable ways and that, by the end, he is cruel and perhaps predatory. While an interpretation shared by many is that the story is less about a hero and a villain than it is about the various hoops a woman will jump through (at her own expense) to avoid making a man uncomfortable, the narrative realism of the story that brings Margot's shifting thoughts and feelings into sharp relief conveys a hidden interiority

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that resists clear instances of consensual communication. At one particularly distressing moment in the story, right before the two characters have sex, Roupenian compares Margot's trepidation about speaking up for herself to a clinical interaction at a restaurant:

> The thought of what it would take to stop what she had set in motion was overwhelming; it would require an amount of tact and gentleness that she felt was impossible to summon. It wasn't that she was scared he would try to force her to do something against her will but that insisting that they stop now, after everything she'd done to push this forward, would make her seem spoiled and capricious, as if she'd ordered something at a restaurant and then, once the food arrived, had changed her mind and sent it back. (2017, 1)

Here, Roupenian gets to the heart of power plays and gendered dynamics, revealing the "lengths women go to in order to manage men's feelings" (Khazan, ctd in Lopes 2021, 705). As a character, Lopes posits, Margot then "became emblematic of a hidden reality of victimization that women pervasively endure" (706), evidenced by the metaphorical conflation that Margot makes between the agency of her own body and a minor culinary inconvenience at a restaurant. It is not until the end of the story, following a text rejection from Margot and moderately long silence, that Robert sees her at a bar with another man and sends her a slew of texts that move from friendly to judgemental to crude and cruel. The final word of the story and last text that Robert sends Margot simply reads "Whore" (1). As Kelly Walsh posits, this ending deviates from "the text's dominant code," as it retroactively blunts the more opaque transactions between them, an opacity that until the end seems central to the nuance and impact of the story (2019, 89).

In "Cat Person," Roupenian delves into the theme of consent regarding the personal (of her characters) and the political (of the sociopolitical contexts that inform these characters). Although clearly published as fiction, many people took to Twitter (now X) and other social media platforms to discuss the work as if Margot was in fact Roupenian, a detail made all the more surprising for the fact that Roupenian was 10 years Margot's senior when the story came out, and was in a long-term relationship at the time with another woman. Many have latterly reflected on this classification of the story as part of the emerging #MeToo, non-consensual genre. Elisabeth de Mariaffi writes on how "Cat Person" was often referred to as an essay or a piece, noting how not only did readers believe that this story was one of Roupenian's own life, but that "there is a particular eagerness to decide that when women write, they are really writing memoir, or *confessional*, as it used to be called in poetry" (2021, 1). Walsh adds in the element of how (despite the story employing many "recognizable devices of narrative fiction" including omniscient narration, free-indirect discourse for dialogue, and a structured plot), many interpretations "involve[d] rather polarized, explicitly moral judgments" concerning whether one character was justified in their action towards the other (90). Online arguments ensued in such a way as to completely lose the plot (pardon the pun), devolving into a series of conversations not about "Cat Person" *as a story*, but instead about how "Cat

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Person" offered insight into a dynamic between two actual people, and whether they were good people or not. Another key debate that circulated concerned Margot's waffling, inner-monologue of critique and shallowness, a general unease towards Robert (despite no overt actions on his part to suggest that he was deeply problematic until the end of the story), as details that worked against her credibility. This particular debate reflected a larger concern in the wake of the #MeToo movement: the problematic expectation that women must be steadfast, benevolent, and relatable on all fronts if they are to garner sympathy and support when it comes to circumstances devoid of consent, sexual or otherwise.

Readers claimed to experience discomfort reading "Cat Person," sometimes leading to a criticism that the story was "unliterary," a criticism that shines a light on a profoundly misogynist cultural underpinning. One Twitter account, "Men React to Cat Person," speaks volumes of some readers' sexism toward the story, Margot, and Roupenian. Many of these Tweets call "her" (Margot? Roupenian? It's unclear) a sociopath for her secret criticisms of Robert and how much they veer from her actions. Others point to Margot's shallowness and emphasis on Robert's physique, and angrily attest to how any instance of non-consensual intimacy was completely her fault for her *inability to communicate clearly*. Other Tweets attest to Robert's full-blown sexual assault of Margot. Thousands of Tweets fall somewhere between these two sides. Very few contributors seem to be aware of the story as, well, a fictional story.

In keeping with de Mariaffi's concern, Constance Grady points out how trivialization of women's stories "also plays into one of the persistent oddities surrounding 'Cat Person'; namely, the frequency with which readers have called it an 'article' or an 'essay'," a perception that Grady links to a pervasive argument of others' that women's literature is not serious literary fiction (2017, 1). Grady goes further to link this dismissive criticism about "Cat Person"'s lack of literary merit as one that unveils a common patronizing—indeed violent—response to confessional women's writing more generally, pointing out how the #MeToo movement came from the fact that Western society at large has never taken women's narratives seriously to begin with (1).

The collapse of any distinction between author and narrator or character, of fact and fiction, moves stories like "Cat Person" away from creative works with literary merit and into the realm of binary-based ethical debates where the depiction of flawed human beings in fiction is projected onto a flawed nature of authors, effectively perpetuating the ability and power of heteropatriarchal institutions to silence female voices by deeming them irrational, inconsistent, or morally dubious. The social reception of "Cat Person" catches red-handed the very culprits who attempt to undermine female-identified-authored narratives by revealing that in many cases, it doesn't matter which woman is telling what story or how they're telling it; they will not be believed, and deliberate misbelief is weaponized by oppressive agents. When women are asking to be "misbelieved" through their writing of fiction, the conflation of author and character exposes how patriarchal power structures refuse legitimacy to any such story, regardless of the content being refused.

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Memoir or Fiction? The Catch-22 for Female-Identified Authors

Unfortunately, a lack of nuance in cultural perceptions of female subjects abounds, and so it is important to crudely ask the questions: Are those intent on furthering a patriarchal agenda trafficking in Madonna-Whore-complexing female writers? Why is it so threatening that women are both ethically and morally complex? When will female writers be able to *both* tell their own stories *and* invent whole universes that have little to do with their day-to-day lives?

Naoise Dolan, an Irish writer who has been exhausted by the same line of questioning Roupenian and many others have endured regarding her fiction, points to the expectation of personal exposure from women writers that is not expected of their male counterparts. She writes: "Women existing in any kind of public capacity are seen as having forfeited our privacy; if I agree to an interview about my work, I am not allowed to mind being asked about my sex life" (2020, 1). Further to this, and citing the "scandal" of Italian novelist Elena Ferrante's pseudonym and concealed identity, writer Pearl Andrews-Horrigan notes how "[e]ven when a woman entirely removes herself from the equation by writing behind a pseudonym, her identity is relentlessly pursued in search of the similarities between her own biography and that of the characters she has created, as if to catch her out" (2020, 1). Andrews-Horrigan conflates the double bind of imagination/personal privacy for female authors, arguing how the latter most often find themselves in a Catch-22. To link her own personal experience to a written account is to "resign herself … to defending its status as fiction," even when men writing similar things are praised for playing with form (1). Any denial of a personal relation to a written account causes many female authors to "face increasingly invasive interviewers" (1). Female authors are largely being objectified, taxonomized, and confined in ways that are not enforced on male authors.

Narrative realism is said to reflect the temporal structure inherent in our way of living and acting, a form that creates space for the messier reality of human interiority meeting external circumstances. Narrative realism, then, is one of the few spaces where victim narratives can fictionally exist, as the logic of abuse and oppression resists any form of traditional "happily-ever-after" linearity, thereby bringing to light the fact that any oppressive system of power is easily threatened by perspectives that deny tidy black and white instances of heroes and villains, and gendered expectations. It is no surprise, then, that a fictional story so acutely outlining the messiness of a gendered power structure has sparked outrage in so many who don't know how to label it, where to put it, or how to understand it.

Misuse of Metaphor: Heteropatriarchal Weaponizing of Symbolic Structures

Metaphor is therefore as central as consent because the rhetorical expectation of metaphorical language within narrative is critical when approaching different

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forms of texts, particularly, in this case, fictional ones. The collapse of the fact that the characters and events in "Cat Person" were constructed symbolically/metaphorically because they exist in fiction, and the replacement of that readerly understanding with an expectation or obsession to find out exactly what is "true," are both problematic elements of readership that distract readers from what a story is trying to do all on its own. Instead of approaching a story with curiosity and openness, some readers are objectifying writers by turning them into symbolic characters rather than allowing the characters to maintain their own symbolism. This readerly move is one that abdicates a kind of responsibility for the reader and places it on the author. There is certainly a case here for the importance of identity politics and sociopolitical contexts of given writers in relation to their works, but none of the female writers discussed here are writing so far outside of their own sociopolitical contexts that this obsession with truth and abdication of fiction should be so heavily foregrounded. The expectation that a female-identified writer must explain herself so exhaustively in relation to her work echoes several of Lorde's points discussed earlier; namely, the idea that the old patterns of patriarchal subjugation "no matter how cleverly rearranged to imitate progress, still condemn us to cosmetically altered repetitions of the same old exchanges, the same old guilt, hatred, recrimination, lamentation, and suspicion" (123). Lateral moves towards autofiction and fictocriticism have demonstrated viable methods to stray from the master's toolbox, but the conflation of these forms, such as seen with Roupenian's story, speak to an attempted return to a totalizing heteropatriarchal agenda that has never been more threatened.

Finally, a note on form that draws attention to not only narrative structure but also truth telling in narrative. Anyone who's ever written a story knows that symbolism is key, even when working below the surface. Narrative conflicts are written to shift dynamics and foster realizations. Character development requires a starting point that often reveals unreliability. The details that a writer includes often speak to the broader themes of the story in ways that real life details of an anecdotal experience are highly unlikely to accomplish. Anyone who has ever told the truth also knows that the selective requirement of narrative—any narrative—forces one to leave things out. Yes, you can say what happened and how it felt, but a totalizing truth that includes your visual perception of the wallpaper in your memory and encapsulates every thought flitting through your mind in the moment of any given memory is very seldom possible, let alone inviting. Expecting or demanding linearity in a narrative is oppressive. Further, fiction with tidy cause-and-effect is a rhetorical tool often used by systems of power to veil the acts of violence that effectively gave power to these systems to begin with. As Zach Pearl notes in "Ghost Writing the Self," hybrid forms of writing such as autofiction and fictocriticism draw attention to the complexity of what it means to write in the first place, to "bifurcate the self into the material I of the body and the literary I of the writing," where said bifurcation of the personal and anecdotal are "elevated as legitimate rhetorical modes that contend with objective and collective stances" (163). To contend with a stance that speaks to the individual and the collective at once is a

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mode that offers an alternate avenue towards honesty and empathy in lieu of metaphorical symbolism; opacity caused by competing selves is unlike the opacity of metaphorical negative capability because it reminds us that many things can be true at once, that a person can hold contradictions and occupy different registers for different reasons, that a woman's ability to invent an entire fictional context does not undermine her ability to exist in a separate and lived truth. Here, Pearl recalls Donna Haraway's technoscientific advocacy to stay "with the trouble," or, in other words, to embrace messiness as a form of resistance against the increasingly corporate logic of social institutions.

If readers want to honour and model consensual frameworks, we need to start trusting that the genre or mode that a female-identified author gives to her creative work is one that must inform our reading. In order to do this, we need to start interrogating culturally-saturated moments where these readerly contracts are overlooked in ways that objectify or dismiss female writers, as seen in the instance of "Cat Person." Hybrid forms of writing, like autofiction and fictocriticism, challenge the status quo because they defy the containment and easy taxonomy of authorial voices, allowing authors the opportunity to tell their own truths with the same discursive, fragmented imperfection that reflects the messiness of lived reality. The growing popularity of these hybrid forms, however, seems to have caused attempts at disempowerment through the conflation of author and character in other forms of writing, like fiction. A more ethically-informed reading starts by paying attention to how to responsibly approach texts, and to consider how forms, genres, and definitions are being misperceived in texts by women. Lorde reminds us of how easily insidious motives can move through ubiquitous ideology, and how we must stop to really consider how language is used and who chooses and disseminates this usage. Perhaps, then, to "stay with the trouble" is to remain ever mindful of the status-quo's appropriation of language in an attempt to defy female agency, and to stop long enough to consider one's own limitations when approaching the words of another person, and ask: *What do I already know? What do I already* think *I know but could be wrong about? What parts of another person's interiority am I entitled to? Why do I feel entitled to begin with?*

Biography

Aley Waterman is a creative writer and English Literature instructor at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University in Corner Brook, Newfoundland. Her first novel, *Mudflowers*, was published by the Dundurn Press Literary Imprint *Rare Machines* in the Fall of 2023. She also published reviews, poetry, short fiction, and non-fiction in *The Brooklyn Review, Trampoline Hall Podcast, Border Crossings Magazine, Riddle Fence, Bad Nudes, Horseshoe Literary Magazine, The Secret Sex Anthology, Hart House Review, NLS,* and elsewhere. She is currently working on her first novella and her second novel with funding from ArtsNL.

Notes

1. Autofiction is a literary form that combines autobiography and fiction.

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2. Carl Rhodes defines fictocriticism as "writing engaged in genre-bending as a literary and theoretical engagement with existence and selfhood" (2015, 289).

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Feminist Resistance in Iran from 1978 to 2023

Arezou Darvishi

Abstract

The recent wave of protests in Iran following the tragic death of Mahsa Jina Amini has sparked discussions about the sudden and unforeseen nature of these events. This paper explores the interconnected nature of women's movements in Iran over the past 45 years, demonstrating that these movements are linked and culminate in the Women, Life, Freedom uprising. By examining various initiatives ranging from the online campaign One Million Signatures in the 1980s, to the collective and collaborative actions of The Girls of the Street Revolution, our objective is to provide a comprehensive understanding of women's rights issues in Iran and shed light on the formation of the Women, Life, Freedom movement.

Key words: Biopolitics, Feminism in Iran, Feminist Movements, Middle East, Spatial Politics, Women's Rights

Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies.

— Hélène Cixous (2010)

Introduction

In recent decades, there have been significant women's movements advocating to gain women's rights within the Islamic Republic (IR) administration in Iran. From the protests in the early 1980s after the imposition of the mandatory dress code law that necessitated all women to wear hijab in public spheres, to the Women, Life, Freedom (WLF) revolutionary movement in 2022 after the "suspicious" death of Mahsa Jina Amini, these uprisings aimed not only to achieve gender equality but also to challenge and transform power dynamics. The tragic death of Mahsa Jina Amini sparked a remarkable wave of women's participation in the WLF uprisings. This movement led to increased freedom of clothing for women in current Iran (see Figure 1) and propagated

a revolutionary spirit that still exists among ordinary people, especially women. Unveiled women still resist wearing scarves in public spaces in spite of the pressure from hard-liners, and people still write and share grievances about the victims of the WLF and spread the hope for a democratic Iran on Instagram and Twitter, despite it being filtered. Nonetheless, having the relative liberty not to wear scarves in Iran does not mean that the outcome or the objective of the WLF was only gaining the mundane right of freedom of clothing. Burning scarves or cutting hair in the WLF movement was a creative, spontaneous performance, an idea that emerged from the inner impulse of Iranian women, not from premeditation or external stimulus of any feminist groups. So, the WLF has a very different essence from the Suffrage Parade of 1913, for example, which was organized by many feminist associations, including the National American Woman Suffrage Association and the National Women's Party (U.S. National Park Service 2021). Regarding the theocratic political systems in Iran, scarves—like bras in the women's liberation movement during second wave feminism—act as an "instrument of oppression" for those who do not believe in veiling, so removing them is liberation from the oppressive power exerted by the political system. Mandatory hijab law reducing women to their bodies is a tool of suppression used by misogynic power. Unlike the popular belief about the WLF being merely feminist or having been propelled by feminists, "this is the first time that popular movement, in Iran, was propelled by feminists" (Makaremi and Naves 2022), the recent Mahsa Amini uprising was driven and led in part by women, not by feminists. The fact that there is no secular, popular, and trustworthy feminist association inside or outside Iran that feeds and guides women to rise for gender equality can be seen as one of the reasons for the absence of feminists' support or role in the WLF movement. The absence of such organizations inside Iran, despite their crucial importance in addressing the misogynistic situation, underscores the oppressive influence of the Islamic administration, which actively suppresses any secular, feminist initiatives. For example, Zanan Magazine, a publication dedicated to advocating women's rights, was founded in 1992. However, it faced various challenges and eventually ceased publication in 2008 when its founder, Shahla Sherkat, was charged in Iran's Press Court (Brekke 2014). Another instance of suppressing feminist movements occurred in 2006 during the Campaign of One Million Signatures. This significant movement advocating for women's rights was met with hostility as its members were targeted and its founders unjustly sentenced to prison (Smeal 2010). Therefore, the systemic oppression of the women's movement exemplifies the prevailing resistance of the Islamic Republic regime to raising awareness about women's rights. Thus the lack of such feminist groups or organizations shows that the WLF movement was not led or organized by feminists; it was rather a manifestation of women probably not all subscribing to feminist ideologies. The movement was also reinforced by men and teenagers who questioned restrictive laws on everyone's rights and sought for everyone's "dignified lives." Limiting the WLF to a specific gender, women here, denies the presence of men and non-binaries who reinforced and perpetuated the shared objective of the revolt, which was to announce that "all" citizens deserve

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"a dignified life," a life that had been humiliated for decades by mismanagement, a poor economic system, and widespread corruption in the government. Hence, I agree with Asef Bayat who argues that this movement is neither a feminist movement by itself nor a revolt mainly against mandatory hijab, but rather a movement to reclaim life and to liberate dignified lives from an internally colonized system (2023, 19). The government acts as a colonizer, marked by an unfamiliar mindset, emotions, and authority, which bear little resemblance to the experiences and beliefs of the majority, which perceives this foreign presence as having taken control of the nation and its assets while continuing to dominate the populace and their way of life. Nevertheless, the importance and peculiarity of this movement compared to the past protests resides in the widespread presence of women who acted as the "major protagonists" as they were once the primary object of a system that colonized its citizens (2023, 19). The Islamic regime employs a religious rhetoric that significantly influences the political system and educational settings. Moreover, the regime not only espouses this distinctive rhetoric but also enforces its beliefs on people's lives, regulating aspects such as dress codes and the educational system with a religious focus. Thus, this paper traces women's role during and after the WLF movement with a focus on the history of women's resistance in Iran after the Islamic revolution in 1978. This study will shed light on the relation of feminist resistance movements in Iran after the 1978 Islamic Revolution to argue that the widespread presence of people, particularly women, in the WLF movement was not abrupt; rather it was a public manifestation of a social turmoil mounting for decades. Throughout this historical review, we notice how women resisted and reclaimed their rights and how such uprisings influenced and gave birth to the other women's movements. In other words, how such uprisings shaped new forms of solidarity among women and de-shaped the theocratic beliefs of the regime. I examine closely how political performances in individual forms, such as Girls of the Revolution Street, and collective forms, such as the common act of women burning their scarves or cutting their hair within the WLF uprising, chains the women's rights movements in Iran. I also refer to "spatial politics" (Pourmokhtari 2022, 2) to understand how women's presence is in dialogue with the politics of public spaces that have become a place for political contests. The contestation of government authority occurs in public spaces, which is referred to as "spatial politics." This phenomenon is particularly prominent in urban areas as these locales in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region historically serve as centers of opposition to state rule. When subjugated bodies confront power to reject or question it, resistance emerges (Foucault 1978, 95). The utilization of public spaces as platforms for counter-power tends to coincide with the dynamics of everyday life, especially in situations where conventional political avenues are lacking. This often happens in regions where political parties are either absent or have limited functionality, and where oppositional groups are deprived of their political rights, particularly when it comes to challenging government policies. Therefore, this is power itself acting as a controller and causing the birth of the resistance.

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Figure 1. Women show resistance by not wearing their head scarves in a street in Tehran (@Tavaana Instagram 2023b).

How Mahsa Jina Amini's Death Gave Rise to Public Resistance

The "suspicious" death of Mahsa Jina Amini on 16 September 2022 in Gasht-E-Ershad (morality police) station for "improper hijab" triggered a public outcry, turning into one of the most severe protests in the history of the Islamic Republic (Bayat 2023, 20). The video footage from a surveillance camera at Gasht-E-Ershad station leaked on social media. It revealed a distressing scene where Mahsa Jina Amini was seen standing in front of a police agent, engaged in a discussion before suffering from a heart attack. Her resistance in the act of standing up for herself to question her unjust arrest in the confines of the police station later extended to her fellow compatriots, taking on various forms of defiance, one of which was active participation in the nationwide protests:

> Waves of protests, led mostly by women, broke out immediately, sending some two-million people into the streets of 160 cities and small towns, inspiring

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> extraordinary international support. The Twitter hashtag #MahsaAmini broke the world record of 284 million tweets, and the UN Human Rights Commission voted on November 24 to investigate the regime's deadly repression, which has claimed five-hundred lives and put thousands of people under arrest and eleven hundred on trial. (Bayat 2023, 20)

Unlike previous anti-system protests, secular women who had been marginalized by the regime and subjected to degradation through the compulsory hijab law after the Islamic Revolution in 1978 played the principal role in leading the WLF movement (Gheytanchi 2022). Generation Z also joined the movement by appearing as resistance forces, reclaiming their agency through unveiling in schools. Amid the WLF movement, videos depicting high school girls removing their hijab went viral. They performed bold acts of defiance by tearing down the portraits of Khomeini, the father of the Islamic revolution, from classroom walls (@Iran International 2022). Another video that gained attraction and became widely shared on social media platforms was female highschoolers chanting in the streets "Zan, Zendegi, Azadi" (Women, Life, Freedom) after they were off of school, while waving their *maqnae* (scarf) in the air (Van Esveld and Sajadi 2022). Similarly, on 23 September 2022, in Mahabad, students at a girls' school gathered in the school courtyard, raising their voices in unison to sing "Baraye" (@Iran International 2022). This powerful protest song, released by Shervin Hajipour, gained significant recognition by turning into one of the revolutionary songs of the movement, and it even received the Social Change Award at the Grammy Awards in 2023. "Baraye" means "for the sake of," and Shervin Hajipour based each verse on tweets where users expressed various reasons for protesting. These reasons encompassed issues like low income, reduced life satisfaction, women's rights, children's rights, refugee rights, animal rights, environmental concerns, economic troubles, theocratic governance, outdated norms, military involvement, political and local corruption, limited freedom of speech, and hostile foreign relations.

The active participation of female students in the WLF movement was not only a means to express their dissatisfaction with the religious norms and advocate for a transformative change in women's rights laws, but it also demonstrated how the revolutionary narratives can permeate within the society, reaching even children, young girls, and teenagers, who adopted these narratives. This further shows how the younger generation is aware of the status quo and how their outlook on the future transcends the limitation of a solely theocratic system. Such revolutionary narratives embraced sharing videos about the movement, tweeting about the movement, the common act of women and girls unveiling in public spheres, cutting hair, and burning headscarves. Women were actively present and demonstrated their agency, contrary to the regime's belief that women should remain confined to their homes, confined to the role of housewives, and obliged to cover their bodies in public spaces, which "are increasingly coming under the control of the state" (Bayat 2013, 53, ctd in Pourmokhtari 2022, 5). But these public places are also serving the will of the people; they become "spaces of resistance," places for political contests, the rejection

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of power, and remaining resilient while being spaces of solidarity as well (Pourmokhtari 5). In authoritarian systems, where public opinion has no outlet, public spaces serve as arenas for expressing dissent. Thus, such "spaces of resistance" serve as spaces of politics that politicize any civil demonstration, including women's presence whose body is "directly involved in a political field" (Pourmokhtari 5). Politicizing public spaces within the power dynamics of the IR regime creates opportunities for dissent and resistance. However, these acts of resistance have also been met with a distressing escalation in atrocities against the protesters. As in the case of the WLF movement, the hard-liners of the regime, in their bid to hold power, continued their atrocities by shooting plastic bullets at female school students in the street who were chanting anti-regime slogans; they also resorted to chemical attacks on female schools. The attack, which began in November 2022, occurred just one month after the protests following Mahsa Jina Amini's death. Thousands of schoolgirls were poisoned and subsequently hospitalized, experiencing respiratory issues, shortness of breath, dizziness, and vomiting (Amnesty International 2023). As stated in *The Guardian*, speculation about possible perpetrators includes the Iranian government itself which seeks revenge against compulsory hijab protesters (Parent 2023). However, the protests were not solely about compulsory hijab; they were fueled by decades of oppression and corruption prevalent across all governmental systems. While the state failed to investigate, many people believed that the government was the likely culprit (VOA Persian Service 2023). The poisoning of the female high schoolers was widely believed to be an intentional act carried out by individuals who had access to specialized military materials and equipment. This led to strong suspicions that the regime was bound to retaliate against the schoolgirls due to their active roles in the WLF revolutionary movement (Admin 2023).

However, the uprising and the support for the movement cannot be confined solely to women, nor are its participants exclusively from Generation Z, the successors of the millennials born from 1990 to 2010, the generation of technology: "This is neither a 'feminist revolution' per se, nor simply the revolt of generation Z" (Bayat 2023, 19). People from various backgrounds actively showed their support by sharing films of themselves removing scarves on social media. One notable feature that distinguished the WLF was the unprecedented support from artists and celebrities who had previously remained silent and faced threats for expressing their views during past protests: "Iranian actresses Hengameh Ghaziani and Katayoun Riahi have been arrested after expressing solidarity with the protest movement and removing their headscarves in public" (Tabbara 2022).

Another Iconic feature of female resistance is Gohar Eshghi, Sattar Beheshti's mother. Her son was a little-known blogger who was arrested and brutally tortured for what the government claimed were "actions against the national security" in 2012 (Memri 2012). Through her unwavering determination to seek justice against her son's murderers, Gohar Eshghi garnered public attention and raised questions about the ruling system of the Islamic Republic. Despite numerous attacks and threats, she displayed immense courage by standing firm

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in her resistance. In a recent act of solidarity with the protesters of the WLF movement, Gohar Eshghi unveiled her hijab after 80 years of abiding by it. Her unwavering actions not only showcased her resilience and support but also indicated that the movement had supporters and participants beyond Generation Z. Also, many supporters, like Gohar Eshghi, were women or men who believed in the scarf and in its religious significance.

How Performance Showcases Resistance

Public acts of women during the WLF revolutionary movement—such as unveiling and symbolically burning scarves, dancing around the flames, and singing revolutionary and inspiring songs at night—captured widespread attention through viral videos (Homa 2022); "Entering its fifth consecutive night, protests in Sari, north of Iran, saw large crowds cheering as women danced around a fire, setting their hijabs alight in defiance of Sharia law" (Tu 2022). Such acts, especially dancing and singing, went against the government's limitation that reserves dancing, singing, and unveiling for private spheres, while publicizing them through collective performances not only showcased a shared unity of purpose and a strong yearning for transformative change but also called into question the existence of the hijab as an oppressor for those who did not believe in wearing it. As Ava Homa states, scarves in Iran's history have symbolized conflicting ideas (2022). However, burning scarves signifies the voicelessness experienced by women in their lack of freedom to choose whether to wear the hijab. This lack of choice is evident not only in the Islamic Republic regime, where hijab is mandatory, but also in Reza Shah's regime (1925-1941), where having a hijab was deemed illegal (Abrahamian 1982). In both cases, women were deprived of the freedom to choose for themselves; the decision was already made on their behalf regarding whether they should or should not wear the hijab:

> Head scarves have a long and complicated history in Iran. Over the years, they have represented contradictory ideas: both backwardness and progressiveness; both misogyny and anti-colonialism; both subversion and subservience. In Iran, over the last century, they have been both wholly banned and wholly mandated. Ultimately, the hijab doesn't mean much in and of itself; it's the wearer who imbues it with meaning. Today, by burning their head scarves, Iranian women are providing meaning: they are breaking that voicelessness. Although Iranian women have been muffled and our bodies barred from the public sphere for centuries. (Homa 2022)

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the acts of burning hijabs and cutting hair symbolize more than just clothing choices; they represent resistance against oppression and the reclaiming of personal autonomy. According to Kumari Jayawardena in her book *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, the adoption of Western clothing styles in the 19th century by Third World countries signified the emergence of the "new woman" or a modernist woman who breaks away from seclusion and embraces a more liberated identity: "The modernists saw the veil as a mark of women's seclusion and backwardness; the

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act of throwing off the veil, regarded as a symbol of feudalism, was given great significance, and occasions when prominent women appeared unveiled became dramatic moments of defiance of the old order" (Jayawardena 1986, 12). In Iran, women's desire for unveiling and their "defiance of the old order," as highlighted by Jayawardena, may not necessarily be driven by aspirations to become "new women" or "modernists." Instead, Iranian women's actions reflect their already existing modernity, awareness, and active presence in society. Their defiance, though, represents a rejection of traditional gender roles and a pursuit of equality and social progress within their own cultural context.

What the History of Feminist Resistance in Iran Reveals

The uprising of women after Mahsa Jina Amini's death was neither abrupt nor a result of agitated public sentiment. The culmination of decades of women's objectification in public spaces through their dress code is one of the reasons for this unprecedented revolt, followed by the spark of feminist resistance (Bayat 2023, 20). The spark of the revolutionary movement WLF had been ignited years ago due to the neglecting of women's rights in Islamic Republic constitution laws:

> When that regime abolished the relatively liberal Family Protection Laws of 1967, women overnight lost their right to initiate divorce, to assume child custody, to become judges, and to travel abroad without the permission of a male guardian. Polygamy came back, sex-segregation was imposed, and all women were forced to wear the hijab in public. Social control and discriminatory quotas in education and employment compelled many women to stay at home, take early retirement, or work in informal or family businesses. (Bayat 21)

Therefore, the outcry was not necessarily against the hijab or Islam in and of itself but rather against the imposition of restrictive laws on women's independence and social rights. Although, women showed their objectification against such patriarchal laws many years ago. One of these acts of disagreement, related to the abolition of the Family Protection Laws of 1967, was the One Million Signature Campaign in 2006. Navid Pourmokhtari, in an interview with Zeynab Peyghambarzade and Sabra Rezaei, two of the campaign's members, writes:

> The campaign's objective lay in reforming all criminal, civil, and family law that discriminated against women. The proposed reforms included equal marital rights for women, e.g., the right to divorce spouses; the abolition of polygamy and temporary marriages; the right of women to pass their nationality onto their children; gender equality with respect to *dieh*, i.e., compensation for bodily injury or death at the hands of a spouse; equal inheritance rights; more stringent laws to deter honor killings; and equal weight given to testimony provided by women in courts of law. (2022, 9)

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Despite the reformist nature of the campaign, the juridical system took a radical approach and sentenced leaders of the campaign to jail and even to lashes (Center for Human Rights in Iran 2009).

During the reformist administration of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), women's resistance took shape within the framework of reformism. The One Million Signature Campaign serves as an illustrative example of this. At the grassroots level, many women challenged the regime's prescribed dress code by altering their clothing choices. By consistently asserting their presence in the public sphere, they began wearing tight, colorful clothing, heavy makeup, and gradually pushing their scarves further back, seen as the "heritage of reformist government" according to *NBC News*: "The looser social rules and dress codes are one of the few legacies left from Iran's once-strong reform movement" (2006). Such loose social rules, however, were prevented in Ahmadinejad's administration (2005-2013), where the morality police were established for the first time. In his administration, after banning women from cycling in cities in 2012, a wave of women cyclists appeared in the streets, causing great anxiety for the authorities (Zamaneh Media 2016): "Thus, it was that on any given day, huge numbers of female cyclists might be seen riding through the parks, boulevards, streets and alleyways of major cities, their mere visibility an act of defiance" (Green Path 2010, ctd in Pourmokhtari 2022, 3).

The Islamic Regime has consistently pursued a policy of concealing the female body and confining women to domestic spaces. Consequently, these gender-based, prohibitive measures, such as banning cycling and mandatory hijab laws, are employed as a means of oppressing women's bodies and curtailing their autonomy by controlling their bodies. Pius Adesanmi believes that the body has always been an arena of suppression and is codified through conservative attire regulations or body inscription:

> The female body has for long been a subject of feminist polemical activity, for the simple reason that it is the site in which centuries of gender oppression are inscribed and made physically manifest, indeed, religion and tradition have often colluded to perpetuate the conquest and the codification of the female body through hyper-conservative vestimental codes or through more extreme corporal inscription like female excision and infibulation. (2002, 138-9)

Therefore, during the WLF movement, the emancipation of instruments of control that objectified female bodies fostered women's empowerment and dismantled the oppressive structures that sought to confine and suppress women. However, these structures have been enfeebled by other women's resistance movements before. For example, My Stealthy Freedom played a crucial role in raising awareness about "hijab as a tool of oppression." Amid the peak of arresting women for "improper hijab," the campaign of My Stealthy Freedom (MSF) (May 2014) was launched by Masih Alinejad, an Iranian Journalist, wherein women posted their photos without a scarf on MSF's Facebook page. The campaign was advanced further by another campaign, White Wednesdays, in May 2017 (Alinejad 2021). It was an individual, connective movement of

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resistance where women removed their white scarves in public places every Wednesday, took a video of this, and sent it to Masih Alinejad. The videos of unveiled women were published on the Facebook account of MSF (Alinejad 2020). Such online movements played a pivotal role in challenging taboos and stereotypes surrounding mandatory hijab, just as social media played a significant role in creating political debates during the Arab Spring: "These [online] movements contributed to the spread of democratic ideas and sparked the grassroots revolution" (Howard et al. 2011, 23). This has been evidenced in the WLF, MSF, and White Wednesdays, which shared similar characteristics, as they aimed to raise awareness about mandatory hijab as an oppressive and undemocratic tool. The White Wednesdays and MSF movements also served as a foundation for the WLF movement, generating grassroots momentum. Whereas Sara Talebian referred to MSF as "slacktivism," suggesting that it only brought joy to unveiled women without leading to on-street protests or legal changes (2019), I believe that the impact of these movements should not be undermined. They actively challenged societal norms and fostered meaningful discussions, contributing to the overall push for change. Hence, it is not unwarranted to assert that the Girls of the Revolution Street in 2017, an individual street-level protest, can be seen as a direct result of these two online movements that had already challenged the stereotypes around hijab. The Girls of the Street Revolution, an urban, individual performance showcasing the feminist anti-hijab resistance, started with Vida Movahed, standing on a utility box on Revolution Street, one of the most crowded streets in Tehran, in 2017, raising a white head scarf high on a stick. She became identified and subsequently arrested. However, her impact and influence have persisted on both significant and smaller levels (Homa 2022). This was followed by other women, and even men, performing the same act in other cities:

> The women were mimicking the act of civil disobedience first exhibited by Vida Movahed on a sidewalk on Revolution St. in Tehran on December 27, 2017. Photos of Movahed's silent protest went viral on social media, turning her into a symbol for women who oppose compulsory clothing regulations. (Center for Human Rights in Iran 2018)

Feminist resistance in Iran has a rich history that extends beyond responding to mandatory hijab and denial of women's rights. The political and economic landscape of Iran has given rise to communities of mothers, wives, and sisters who seek justice for their loved ones, such as children, husbands, or brothers killed during various protests under the Islamic Republic regime. In 2020, the economic uprising sparked by the increase in oil prices led to the emergence of a collective feminist resistance known as the *Maadaraan-e Aban* (Mothers of October), reminiscent of the "Mothers of Khavaran" campaign in the 1990s. These campaigns embody the collective resilience and solidarity of justice-seeking mothers whose sons and daughters lost their lives due to state actions, whether in the October 2022 uprising or in the mass execution of political prisoners during the summer of 1989 (Mohajer 2007). These groups of mothers

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eventually formed a larger community called the Iranian Complainant Mothers, including mothers who lost their children in the WLF movement, the 2017-18 protests, and the Ukraine Flight tragedy (Ghajar 2021). The activism of Iranian Complainant Mothers expands the feminist resistance narrative, connecting it to a broader struggle for human rights and social justice within Iran. In this way, the feminist resistance movement in Iran embodies a multifaceted approach that intersects with various forms of oppression, amplifying the voices and experiences of women in their fight for equality and justice.

Maryam Golabi, in her important article "Aesthetics of Invisibility in Iranian Women's Identity and their Domestic Space during the 1980s," takes an interdisciplinary approach to architecture and gender studies to indicate that dwellings are not only spaces to live in, but they also showcase how social practices and rules influence the reshaping of gender identity (2022, 1634). She conceptualized the "aesthetic of invisibility," referring to the fact that the IR regime aestheticized and appreciated the invisibility of the female body and domestic spaces. Golabi states that:

> Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic, attributed the invisibility of the female body and the domestic interior to aesthetics in his Resaleh, Towzih al-Masael (A Clarification of Questions). Commenting on the importance of veiling, Ayatollah Khomeini stated that 'the perfect woman (the veiled woman described in the Quran) is like a pearl in a shell, and an unveiled woman is similar to artificial jewelry, which is available without cover everywhere.' (Khomeini 1980, 54, ctd in Golabi 2023, 1623)

Therefore, if the "aesthetic of invisibility" in the Islamic Republic regime defines women and their beauty by their "invisibility," in their "veiling," Iranian women's resistance, as demonstrated through their political actions, can manifest within the realm of an "aesthetic of visibility." The objective of the aesthetic of visibility is to garner attention so that women can be heard, felt, and seen. To achieve this, the women actively bring themselves into view by being present in the social sphere, discarding the veil in which they do not believe, and sharing the stories of victims on their social media channels. Despite enduring injuries during the WLF uprising, many victims continue to propagate revolutionary ideas by sharing their life experiences following the movement. To name a few, Sima Moradbeigi, who courageously endured a gunshot wound to her arm by the police during the uprising, and Elahe Tavakolian, who unfortunately lost one of her eyes, still share their hope for a better future on their social media accounts; thus serving as remarkable examples of resilience.

Conclusion

The studied performative protests not only vouched for the revolutionary power of women but also they were means of self-expression against the systemic oppression of women's rights. Throughout this article, I argued that the regime aims to invisibilize, exclude, and remove women, while feminist movements aim to visibilize, include, and discuss women's rights. To accomplish this,

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women, exemplified by the Women, Life, Freedom and Girls of the Street Revolution movement, seize control of public spaces to exhibit their resilience and strength. Furthermore, social media serves as an additional platform where women capitalize on opportunities to voice their unity and engage in discussions surrounding their rights, as evidenced by movements like Mothers of October and White Wednesdays. Performances such as cutting hair and burning scarves, dancing around the fire in solidarity, raising a white headscarf on a stick, taking off the white scarves on White Wednesdays, being present in public spaces without hijab, and bicycling in streets, show the "art of presence" (Bayat 2023). In this research, I outlined past feminist movements to argue that Women, Life, Freedom was not unexpected. The history of the women's movement also demonstrated how each movement was defined by its political era. Activists first took a reformist perspective to women's rights during Khatami's administration, but after Ahmadinejad's government, feminist uprisings became more radical and intertwined with demanding regime change. Even though women gained a relative freedom to hijab these days in Iran, hard-liners and some religious citizens have never stopped "enjoining good and forbidding wrong" (*Amr-e be marouf va nahy az monkar*), in Sharia law. They still warn unveiled women to wear a scarf in public places (@Tavaana 2023a).

The primary emphasis of this paper was on selected feminist resistance movements that emerged after the 1978 Revolution. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the scope of this research did not encompass all feminist movements such as the *Dokhtar-e Abi* (Blue Girl). Also, it is necessary to focus on a nuanced perspective of the feminist resistance on a domestic level. In my future research, I will write about many women and girls whose parents act as a localized oppressive power curbing the choice of attire of the female members in families. Their stories underscore the need to address domestic violence and control, which is a hindrance to feminist activism, stifles the reclamation of women's autonomy and independence within their own homes, and deters them from voicing their rights collectively in public spaces alongside others. Recognizing the significance of a comprehensive understanding, further exploration of the history of feminism in Iran, including periods preceding the Islamic revolution, such as the Pahlavi and Qajar eras, would provide valuable insights into the evolution, challenges, and contributions of feminism in the Iranian context.

Biography

Arezou Darvishi is a second-year master's student in French at the Romance Languages Department at the University of Oregon. She received her BA in French Translation and Language in 2019 from Allameh Tabatabai University. Born and raised in Iran, her passions lie in Iran's women's studies, gender and language, religion and gender, and digital feminism. She is currently working on her thesis titled "Veiling and unveiling in Iran and in France: how French feminism interprets Women, Life, Freedom movement." She presented her initial findings in this paper at the 2023 Fall Forum held by the Romance Languages Department of the University of Oregon.

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Hashtag Re-Appropriation, Voices of Reason, and Strategic Silences: 'Soft' Feminist Resistance Practices on Swedish Social Media

Lisa Lindqvist

Abstract

This article challenges the perception of feminist activism on social media as impulsive, emotional, and necessarily underpinned by neoliberal substructures. Instead, it reveals deliberate and strategic approaches employed by interviewed Swedish feminist organizations and activists that navigate commercialized social media spaces while subverting online norms and platform constraints in subtle and ingenious ways. By operating within and going along with some logics of the economy of visibility that dominate online spaces, activists use "soft" feminist resistance practices to destabilize popularized versions of feminism and threats of online misogyny. Examples include reappropriating popular hashtags to gain reach, employing a voice of reason in heated online debates, and using silence to deter trolling. These practices represent creative forms of feminist resistance against oppressive online structures and polarized cultures. By employing "soft" feminist resistance, activists carve out spaces on social media where they can disseminate knowledge and envision feminist futures strategically and safely. In this way, the article suggests a hopeful approach to feminist possibilities granted by social media, while emphasizing the labor required by activists to challenge and resist threats of online violence, thus highlighting the need for platforms to enhance their safety measures.

Key words: Activism, Digital Feminism, Hashtags, Online Misogyny, Social Media

Introduction: Social Media Feminism and Soft Resistance

Feminist activism on social media is oftentimes conflated with the popularized iterations of "empowerment feminism" with neoliberal underpinnings that thrive online (Banet-Weiser 2018). It is frequently construed as an ad hoc, ill-thought-through, and emotional activity that sometimes results in unexpected moments of viral hashtags (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2019). However, social media feminism is a vastly heterogeneous phenomenon, and

several scholars suggest it is principally strategic and deliberate when it comes to the framing of issues as well as the choice of platform, whether performed by organized groups or individual activists (Keller 2019; Hansson, Sveningson, and Ganetz 2021). Although social media platforms often algorithmically amplify content that is polarizing, emotionally triggering, easily digested, and risk supporting the sexist and neoliberal structures that help to reproduce an unjust society (see, for instance, Papacharissi 2015 and Noble 2018), users also utilize platforms in creative ways to disseminate content and build relationships that challenge these structures.

Social media feminism is situated within an "economy of visibility," where feminists can feel forced to implement norms and trends to reach their audience (Glatt and Banet-Weiser 2021). Still, there are a number of online feminist practices that work to challenge such norms and circumvent sexist online cultures and technical restrictions of social media platforms. Some radical examples are "feminist digilante" activities like naming and shaming perpetrators online (Jane 2017a) and feminist coding, which has resulted in alternative digital platforms like HarassMAP for mapping sexual assault (https://harassmap.org/en/). But there are a multitude of other feminist practices that might be less obvious, however, and no less important in the struggle to challenge hegemonic versions of popularized feminism.[1] I suggest using the term 'soft' feminist resistance practices[2] in order to describe online feminist actions that are employed within commercialized social media spaces and the economy of visibility but still find ingenious ways to challenge both social media cultures and neoliberal feminism. 'Soft' feminist resistance works to nuance polarized debates, to mobilize in non-public spaces of social media to avoid trolling attacks, and to disseminate knowledge to unexpected and potential allies. In this article, I suggest three such 'soft' feminist resistance practices, described in my interviews with six Swedish communications specialists for feminist organizations, one journalist, and one feminist activist group, all of whom use commercial social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok for feminist advocacy and knowledge dissemination. They appropriate popularized hashtags by adding them to unexpected feminist content, employ a voice of reason-strategy in heated online debates, and use silence as a tool to stop trolling attacks and conserve energy. In these ways, the participants perform feminist resistance against sexist and neoliberal social media infrastructures, popularized iterations of feminism, and online cultures of polarization.

Social Media as Spaces for Political Deliberation

Social media platforms are peculiar spaces in which to operate when trying to do feminism. They are often described, not least by the companies who made them, as facilitators of democracy—a statement that has been extensively scrutinized by scholars and activists. As the largest social media platforms make their money off advertisers, their automatic algorithmic sorting and dissemination of content will amplify messages that prompt users to engage and thus stay on the platform (Gillespie 2018). For a message to become viral on social media, it needs to follow traditional media logic, such as urgency, emotional

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attachment, and novel or surprising information (Gil de Zúñiga, Koc Michalska, and Römmele 2020). Further, social media will amplify emotional content even more, as they aim to always retain and engage audiences to capitalize on them by offering efficient ad space to advertisers. This means increased visibility for polarizing, shocking, seemingly unfiltered, and emotionally engaging content (Papacharissi 2015; Gil de Zúñiga, Koc Michalska, and Römmele 2020). Such activities also allow misinformation, online hate, and trolling activities to thrive in these spaces. Moreover, it is obvious that the companies behind some of the largest commercial social media platforms—Facebook, Instagram, and X—have not done enough to counter-act online harassment and violence, which mostly affects women, girls, and other marginalized groups (Jane 2017b).

The ways in which social media platforms sort, amplify, and downplay content and other technical specificities of the platforms are often referred to by digital scholars as affordances. In relation to social media, affordances are what the platforms enable users to do (Bucher and Helmond 2018). This means that the concept has a technical component, an individual information-processing component, as well as a social component. Users build on each other's online practices and continuously develop and expand online cultures. However, the infrastructures and techniques behind the platforms inevitably delimit what can be done and said online. Thus, how social media users understand technical specificities and features of platforms, such as algorithms, will shape their behaviour online. Amplification of emotionally engaging content might lead to framing practices that utilize this feature, or that try to resist it, as I will discuss in the results section of this article. At least the "imagined algorithms" in the minds of social media users will, in one way or another, shape what they do online.

I focus on the mainstream platforms with the largest user bases in Sweden (and in extensive regions of the world): Facebook, Instagram, X, and TikTok (globally, there are 3 billion monthly active users on Facebook, 1.21 billion on Instagram, 368 million on X, and 656 million on TikTok according to Statista.com). Given their size, they provide important opportunities for feminists to disseminate knowledge and entice action. Scholars looking into early social media platforms of the 2010s emphasized the potential to reach large audiences and how these "imagined audiences" might have affected content producers (see, for instance, Marwick and boyd 2011). However, as audiences and the amount of content online have grown vastly, platform affordances like sorting algorithms have become a considerable force affecting the dissemination potential in these spaces (Gillespie 2018; Zuboff 2019; Gayo-Avello 2015). It is important to note that it is not only the technical affordances of social media platforms—how they afford particular shapes to content by way of technical specificities and moderation rules and practices as well as particular sorting and disseminating through engagement-based algorithms—that shape content, but also how users imagine these affordances and interpret them.

Both "imagined audiences" and "imagined algorithms" thus affect how feminist content producers strategize to disseminate knowledge and mobilize resistance. The technical specificities of platforms that tell them the maximum

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length of a text or the format of an image, and their knowledge of successful framing of issues for maximum potential reach and chance for virality, are important aspects of what makes up feminist discourse in the social media sphere.

Digital Feminist Activism in an Economy of Visibility

Social media platforms provide opportunities for feminist organizing, networking, and knowledge dissemination (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2018). In an article from 2019, media scholar Jessalynn Keller suggests that social media gives feminists a platform where they can express their frustration from encounters with sexist structures in everyday life, find likeminded individuals, and organize in feminist networks. At the same time, popular renderings of feminism on social media oftentimes emphasize individual rather than structural change. As feminism seems to be experiencing a viral moment in contemporary culture, the version that is making the rounds is underpinned by messages of self-confidence, personal empowerment, and how to reach your full potential (Banet-Weiser 2018; Gill and Orgad 2015). These versions of feminism fail to critique either "the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism (or the media platforms that are co-constitutive with capitalism)" (Banet-Weiser, Gill, and Rottenberg 2020, 4).

Internal critique within the feminist community, for instance, pointing out neoliberal underpinnings of self-empowerment and improvement discourse (see, for instance, Banet-Weiser 2018; Worthington 2020) and of feminist iterations based on personal responsibility as I have written about elsewhere (Lindqvist and Ganetz 2020), is immensely important if we want to create meaningful visions for a just future. Social media does support a particular political infrastructure where visibility is conflated with capitalism, inviting iterations of feminism that can be churned out and sold as t-shirts or manifestos in the style of Sheryl Sandberg's Lean In (Banet-Weiser 2018). However, viral feminist online moments and hashtags might spark interest with women, girls, and non-binary people, leading them to further engage with feminist ideas and organizations (Clark-Parsons 2021; Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2018). As feminists strategize to get their message across, they might choose to go along with some traits of popular/capitalist iterations of feminism, such as utilizing media logics of visibility and emotion (Banet-Weiser, Gill, and Rottenberg 2020). Social media platforms house a vast variety of ideas that share space and feed off of each other, making it all the more important to look into how feminists maneuver these complex spaces and what opportunities and challenges they come across.

Online Misogyny and Feminist Practices of Resistance

Doing feminism online also means being susceptible to online hate. Although trolling behaviours, hateful comments, and serious threats are a part of being online, media and gender studies scholar Emma Jane (2017c) quotes a 2015 United Nations report that suggests that women are 27 times more likely to be exposed to online abuse than men, and emphasizes that gendered online violence poses a threat to opportunities to speak and be heard online for women

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and girls. Media scholar Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) has pointed out the connections between the rise of popular feminism and the widespread prevalence of "popular misogyny," a networked version of misogyny that utilizes the visibility and language of online culture to spread anti-feminist messages. Further, several analyses of the online discourse in the so-called "manosphere"—"a set of blogs, podcasts, and forums comprised of pickup artists, men's rights activists, anti-feminists, and fringe groups" (Marwick and Caplan 2018, 543)—suggest that prevalent themes include verbal abuse against women and a perceived victimization of men that is reinforced by feminists who are deemed to be man-haters (Dickel and Evolvi 2022; Marwick and Caplan 2018).

However, when it comes to digital feminist activism, activists resist such structures by creating strategies for carving out space and reappropriating platform affordances (Clark-Parsons 2021). Jane points out that women and girls fight back against cyber violence by "fight responses," like naming and shaming and calling out perpetrators, as well as "flight responses," like moderating their tone and opting out of particular conversations (2017b, 51). While Jane uses the concept of "flight responses" to describe practices such as sidestepping contentious debates, hiding or blocking, and seeking refuge in non-public online spaces, I suggest they are instead examples of 'soft' feminist resistance practices in response to online misogyny and platform affordances that amplify harmful content. Further, I suggest that feminists oftentimes mix observable and hidden resistance practices to ensure both visibility and safety.

To summarize, I suggest that social media feminism is shaped by and needs to respond to social media platform affordances, popularized neoliberal iterations of feminism, and the threat of online misogyny and gendered violence. In the following, I explore feminist social media strategies by discussing three 'soft' feminist resistance practices that feminists employ in the Swedish social media landscape.

The Current Feminist Moment in Sweden

Sweden is a Northern European country of 10 million inhabitants with high self-esteem and international regard when it comes to gender equality and institutionalized feminism. For instance, the former government decided on a "feminist politics for a gender equal future" in 2016, introducing, among other things, the new governmental Swedish Gender Equality Agency. Sweden has long been regarded, nationally and internationally, as a gender equal society. However, in recent years, the gendered pay gap has increased, and women still take longer parental leave than men (Swedish Gender Equality Agency 2021). Women are also more exposed to domestic violence than men by 40% (The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention 2023). Additionally, the current liberal-conservative government governs with the support of the far-right party Sweden Democrats and now puts their efforts into restricting immigration, introducing harsher punishment for gross crimes, and restricting access to welfare benefits rather than combating gender inequality. However, in their statement of government policy from 2023 (Government Offices of Sweden 2023), they claim that "Sweden will remain a strong voice for gender equality,"

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citing the importance of equal health care and combating honour-based violence, but little more.

#MeToo had a vast dispersion in Sweden in the fall of 2017, which gave rise to widespread feminist organizing around almost 80 industry-specific petitions for change to end sexism in the workplace (Hansson 2020). These organizations emerged from hidden Facebook groups, shared Google docs, and other technical tools for collecting and sharing testimonials of experiences of sexual abuse and assault in the workplace (Hansson, Sveningson, and Ganetz 2021). In relation to these organizing initiatives, offline events such as manifestations, street protests, and debate forums took place in the following years (Pollack 2019). Since then, several other feminist hashtags have been prevalent and offline events have taken place in their wake. For instance, the hashtag *#kvinnostrejk* ("women's strike") started appearing on Swedish social media in March 2021, calling on women to go on strike every Friday at 3PM and gather in local squares, protesting sexist societal structure (Rådne 2021). Since then, groups of feminists have come together to perform local manifestations in a number of cities around Sweden under the *#kvinnostrejk* flag. Local *#kvinnostrejk* groups run Instagram accounts for performing online feminist advocacy. While I am writing this, the hashtag has 17,232 posts on Instagram.

However, Swedish feminist scholars and activists have noted a backlash against feminist issues since the #MeToo wave of 2017, citing a lack of attention to issues of sexism and harassment in the 2018 election (Pollack 2019), and an experienced increase in the public sphere of far-right narratives of sexism as an "imported" problem following a rise in popularity for nationalist party Sweden Democrats.

Methods and Participants

During the spring of 2023, I talked to seven Swedish feminists and one anonymous activist group about their experiences of and strategies for doing feminist work on social media platforms. Five of the participants work as communications specialists for feminist advocacy/women's rights organizations, one is a journalist and cultural worker, one is an administrator for the social media accounts of a feminist organization on a voluntary basis, and the activist group runs a radical feminist X account. The participants and I attempt to describe feminist practices of 'soft' resistance against underlying sexist structures of social media platform affordances, and strategies for getting meaningful feminist messages across in the highly commercialized online spaces of Instagram, Facebook, X, and TikTok, as these were the most important platforms for the participants.

The interviews lasted between one and two hours. I spoke to the participants individually, except for two women working for the same organization, whom I met at the same time. I also had a conversation through X direct messages with the anonymous admin group of a radical feminist account. I did three of the interviews online on Zoom, and the others in various offline settings chosen by the participants. They took place between February and May of 2023, except for the direct message-interview, which stretched out between

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November of 2022 until January 2023 with a number of exchanges and follow-up questions. I used a semi-structured interview guide with topics and questions around social media platform affordances, online cultures, discourses, and the #MeToo movement. The latter topic was included because of the way in which I had identified the participants: from a large dataset of around 200,000 tweets containing "metoo," collected for an article on Swedish hashtagging practices around #MeToo (Lindqvist and Lindgren 2022). However, this article does not directly address that part of the interviews. I performed thematic coding of the interviews, an iterative process that I initiated with the concepts "platform affordances," "online cultures," and "versions of feminism" in mind (Fugard and Potts 2019). For the purpose of this article, I used the concept of "feminist resistance" in the second phase of coding, which resulted in the three 'soft' feminist resistance practices that I present in this article.

Feminist Practices of Soft Resistance on Swedish Social Media: Reappropriation, Voice of Reason, and Silence

Scholars have rightly pointed out that we might be living in a postfeminist sensibility wherein commercial and feminist messages are conflated and dispersed in social media economies of visibility (Gill and Orgad 2015; Banet-Weiser 2018). At the same time, many feminists use ingenious strategies to simultaneously utilize and challenge online norms in order to make sure their message actually comes across and reaches their intended audience instead of drowning in the vast and algorithmically-sorted social media landscapes of Facebook, Instagram, X, and TikTok.

By going along a little bit in order to then go against it, feminists carve out (sub)spaces for meaningful networking and knowledge dispersion within the highly marketized spaces of commercial social media platforms. Such strategies should be documented, as they can benefit others who perform feminist work on social media. In this section, I map out some 'soft' feminist resistance practices that challenge commercialized "empowerment feminism" while simultaneously attempting to reach new audiences through social media platforms by utilizing their infrastructure in creative ways. These acts of feminist resistance derive from the interviews described above. All interview quotes are translated from Swedish and pseudonyms are used. The interview participants are:

- Hannah, a communications specialist for a women's rights organization that focuses on gendered violence.
- Siri, a communications specialist for a women's rights organization that focuses on gendered violence.
- Emma and Charlotte, communications specialists for a feminist organization focusing on sexual and reproductive rights.
- Anna, a communications specialist for a feminist organization focusing on gender equality.
- Felicia, a cultural worker, and journalist.
- Caroline, a non-paid social media admin for a feminist sub-organization to a professional association.

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- "FemGroup," the anonymous admin group behind a radical feminist X account.

Feminist Reappropriation of Hashtags and Trending Topics

According to the recent report "The Swedes and the Internet 2023" (The Swedish Internet Foundation), 91% of Swedes that are on the Internet use social media weekly: 59% were on Facebook, 53% were on Instagram, 11% on X, and 18% on TikTok. The participants agree that Instagram is where the feminist community is nowadays, while X is dominated by journalists, politicians, and anti-feminist far-right groups. Facebook is deemed helpful when organizations need resources like money or volunteers, but otherwise considered a bit "dead." Only Charlotte and Emma used TikTok in their daily work.

Outside of viral hashtag phenomena like #MeToo, Swedish feminists work to increase visibility and disseminate knowledge regarding key issues. Working within capitalized spaces like Facebook, Instagram, X, and TikTok, they have developed strategies to utilize viral moments and trends to reach these goals by reappropriation and 'soft' hashtag hijacking. Siri, who works for an organization that fights against gender-based violence, explains that she struggles to reach outside of her organization's filter bubble, especially on Instagram. Although the support of other similar organizations and women who are passionate about the same issues as them helps the work that Siri tries to do online, there is also a need to reach new audiences. So, she does something that is usually framed as either hostile or marketized: hashtag hijacking, a practice where actors attempt to capitalize on viral hashtags by connecting them to their brand or where political opponents fill activist hashtags with opposing content. In this way, Siri disseminates feminist knowledge through "ordinary" and everyday hashtags like #DayAtTheBeach. Siri says:

> We have many challenges, and filter bubbles may be the most important one. We have our little group that we can easily reach, like 89% women, so it feels a lot like preaching to the choir. … I try to, like, hijack hashtags, ordinary things like "#Mother" or "#FamilyInXXX" [the city where the organization operates], to reach more people, because if we only use for instance "#WomensRights," we will always just reach the same people … So, I always try to think of other topics that we touch on, like the city where we operate, or because we support children and do family-oriented activities, we can talk about parent-and-children-stuff, maybe "#Playground" or "#DayAtTheBeach." And that usually increases the reach for our content, more people see what we do and share our content as well. We get more viewings if we are creative with tagging.

FemGroup also utilizes popular hashtags to increase their reach. But while Siri wants to reach outside of her filter bubble, FemGroup works to realign political hashtags and gear them toward feminist issues. As they work exclusively on X, they take care to use the fact that the Swedish X audience consists largely of journalists and politicians. The hashtag #svpol is widely used on X to tag content about Swedish politics, and FemGroup noted that this oftentimes means content about financial politics:

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> We often use #svpol in order to show that issues concerning women's rights and women's lives should make an impression on Swedish politics because they are political issues at their core. Safety of women and children, legal certainty, the right to a life free from discrimination, these issues affect more than half of the population, a majority. … An enormous amount of attention is paid to financial issues, one-sided criminal politics, and energy. It's difficult to make an impact with issues related to women's rights. Using #svpol is a statement that part of politics is missing in Sweden.

Thus, reappropriating hashtags is a soft feminist resistance practice that utilizes virality to put feminist issues on the political agenda and in the public's minds. In the same vein, the participants talked about how they make use of trending topics on social media to diseminate feminist knowlege. For instance, Emma explains how they use trending and viral phenomena to increase their visibility and efficiently disseminate feminist knowledge:

> So now we're getting into like, jumping onboard when things go viral, especially now that we are living in the TikTok-reality, using Tiktok has a lot to do with going along with trends, and you have to find ways to connect the trend to an issue that we want to talk about, and the trends can be like a sound you know, so it's the opposite of, like, okay everyone is talking about this so we have to do that too. On Tiktok we can take a trending sound and we decide what we want it to be about.

Similarly, feminists go along with trending topics in order to discuss, add nuance, and even critique them. Anna describes her approach to work with popularized and commercialized versions of feminism that are present and often viral on social media, which aims to utilize and problematize them simultaneously:

> Some days I feel a bit tired at the thought of how feminism gets watered down and commercialized and all these things, but on the other hand, I'm thinking I'd rather have that than not seeing feminism online at all. And if you try to be tactical and use it—there's a big difference between just thinking that so long as everyone calls themselves feminists or everyone wears a t-shirt with a feminist message everything will be solved, and not being satisfied there but seeing it as a start. … Not work against it, but see it as an opportunity—at least in public, and then in feminist spaces we can be critical and discuss … but it might be counter productive if we do that in public because then we will undermine something that actually could be productive. … You can start out being simple and then bring more nuance and critical perspectives.

As commercial social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X, and TikTok use algorithmic sorting based on historical data, particular types of content will be amplified, and this produces both filter bubbles and popularized versions of politics. Reappropriating hashtags and trending topics can be a way to circumvent this harsh sorting and reach new audiences, redirect political

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hashtags, or critique popular feminism. Thus, I suggest it is a 'soft' feminist resistance practice.

Feminist Voices of Reason

To be the voice of reason is often construed to be rational, devoid of emotions, and based in facts. To be a feminist voice of reason on social media might be a bit like that, but also somewhat different. The participants describe that they do feel angry and frustrated by both the issues they work with and with the polarized climate online. Even though expressing these feelings online could amplify them algorithmically, they take care to channel their anger into producing factual, constructive, and research-based content. This feminist voice of reason is used as a way to circumvent threats of online hate that circulate in the manosphere by resisting the common anti-feminist trope that feminists are irrational, overly-sensitive man-haters (Marwick and Caplan 2018). The feminist voice of reason is also used as a strategy for being heard outside of feminist spaces. It is less about pretending there are no emotions at play and more about being clear and producing meaningful content that describes attainable goals and visions for a feminist future.

Hannah, who works to spread knowledge about gender-based violence, explains the desire to maintain a sensible level of online conversations to counteract attacks from anti-feminists:

> Sometimes, I have to admit, sometimes I want to write "are you a complete and utter idiot, old man," but I don't, of course, because we want to maintain a sensible conversation and a respectful way to interact. At times we've had to say to someone that, no, that tone that you're using is not okay for us.

Hannah thus suggests that although she feels frustrated, it is important for her organization to express themselves in a levelheaded way. Social media spaces arguably amplify polarizing content, which makes it difficult to maintain a feminist voice of reason, especially in the face of online misogyny. Siri describes that her main strategy for getting their message across is to be factual and balanced. However, at times, this is undermined by anti-feminists and social media affordances:

> My experience is that they [anti-feminists] are difficult to argue with, but sometimes I feel like I need to protest what they are saying, so I will go in with a short and factual statement. But to face these people, it can be a bit scary to see that there are people with these opinions in the world … it's a bit crazy that there is so much misogyny. … And to nuance is not always popular online, we try to not choose sides … but social media are not built with this in mind, it's more "I really believe this" or "I really don't like that." Those that have strong opinions, they are more visible.

Additionally, Siri feels that her organization is responsible for delivering their message in a way that circumvents anti-feminist critique and goes against online polarization:

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> There is so much written online that is not true … I feel like we have a responsibility to deliver facts, because we are often criticized for exaggerating things and you know "this is not a real issue," so it's really important that we can actually back our statements with facts.

This felt responsibility for keeping online conversations sensible is echoed in my conversation with Charlotte and Emma. They work for a Swedish organization working for equal sexual and reproductive rights. For them, it's important that their content presents facts and research-based claims, which means they knowingly work counter to social media logics of affect and polarization, as Emma explains:

> It's often in relation to polarized issues that we feel it's extra important to be a factual and calm actor … that we don't contribute to the heated discussions … but we've still been attacked for things that we haven't even said … and so our strategy has sort of been that "when they go low, we go high," and sometimes we feel like we might lose rhetorical points because of that.

Notably, the participants take responsibility for calming down heated debates online and take particular care to craft content that bypasses classic anti-feminist rhetoric. However, they do feel strongly that diverse feminist action needs to happen simultaneously on social media. Although they want to be feminist voices of reason, they suggest that we need to hold space for more emotional expressions, too. For instance, Caroline, who works for a feminist organization tied to a professional association, describes how angry content should appear alongside the feminist voice of reason:

> We try to use the type of language that is common in academia, dry and boring, like in a research article, because we don't want it to be polarizing … so there is a difference in how you speak, we don't really say that 'this is insane!' or something like that, but I think that … all the people who scream loud or use expressions like 'f*** pig!', we need them too.

In my conversation with Anna, she expressed similar thoughts. Anger has its place in feminist struggle and digital feminism too, but it's important to also present factual solutions. She suggests:

> Sometimes you might need to take some time at first and allow yourself to be upset, and to try and analyze and understand the problem you're dealing with, before you can present ideas for solutions. And that is where we place ourselves, that our role is to find those ideas. Everyone else can be upset, but when we get into it, we want to suggest ways forward. We don't want to just fire people up.

In all interviews, I got a sense of the way feminists work to channel their anger and frustration into factual and visionary online action. This is contrary to both anti-feminist accusations of irrational man-hating, polarizing social me-

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dia spaces and claims that social media feminism is ill-thought-through, impulsive, and meaningless (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2019). In this way, these feminists bypass critical voices in their (imagined and very real) audiences while utilizing the power of affective force. Felicia explained her reasoning when she was active in the social media debate around #MeToo in 2017:

> I was never interested in, I mean, it was more about being very clear, in order to make clear what needed to change … and I wasn't interested in being the millionth person to say that 'that guy is a pig' you know, it's not really productive. But emotions are what we all use to think and to contemplate, so it's not against emotions at all. It's more trying to be very clear and specific … because I mean bitterness is often not very productive, but anger can be a very productive emotion.

A feminist voice of reason is thus not devoid of emotions but channels affective flows in productive ways. As a soft feminist resistance practice, it counteracts online polarization, circumvents anti-feminist critique and attacks, and presents solutions to problems with societal sexism.

Feminist Silences to Thwart and Sidestep Online Hate

In the face of online hate and misogyny, feminists perform two types of active silences: refusing to refute anti-feminist comments and attacks and avoiding particular discussions and platforms. Platform affordances and platform-specific audience constitution are both important features of these feminist silences. And yet, it's clear that if you do feminism on social media, you run the risk of being exposed to hate, trolling, and assaults against your person. FemGroups explains that as long as they have been online, they have encountered these attempts to silence them. They respond by not responding:

> We have done this for so long, we know attacks like that are just a part of everyday life as a feminist. You can't provoke us or make us back down by attacking us online. We don't waste time on refuting it, especially because we feel that these attacks are employed as a strategy to get us to waste time on endless conversations with them instead of publishing feminist content.

Thus, not going into battle but rather remaining silent in response to trolls, hateful comments, and misogynistic attacks is a strategy for energy conservation that enables feminists to turn to more meaningful actions rather than Jane's notion of a "flight response" (2017b). At the same time, especially for those who work full-time with feminist communications, subjection to hate and threats against your person can be intense. Anna explains how her organization constantly keeps up to date with and uses technical tools available to counter hate on social media platforms:

> We have always had some hate directed towards us and at times it's been threatening and we had to take action … we found constructive ways to deal with it and there are a lot of technical tools like blocking, hiding, all those things,

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> and we report threats to the police. We always keep up with the tools available on the platforms, and we make sure we're quick to hide hateful comments, because if we leave them there, things spiral and they start dominating the comment fields … and we don't hide constructive critique of course. But the hide-function is great, they still see their comment but others can't see it. Because if they notice, they might start e-mailing or calling . . .

Although some of the participants developed strategies to maintain their activity on social media platforms in the face of online hate, others don't have the same resources for it and rightly point out that the effect can be silencing. Hannah, who is the only person in her organization who works with communications, says that she also uses the strategy of silence, though not always voluntarily:

> Sometimes it's easier to not do anything, because if you do something you might get a ball rolling that you never intended to roll. When you stick your neck out and you get these hateful comments and threats, it's just words, but still they create fear and unsafety, it censors people and we lose the democratic conversation online … they scare people to silence by using threats, hate, stalking, or mobilizing their troll army. They have a lot of power.

Several participants specifically point out X as a space dominated by far-right groups and anti-feminists, which leads them to avoid it entirely. In Sweden, X is not a very popular platform; only around 20% of internet users are on it at all, and many are journalists and politicians. Although Hannah feels X is a great tool for getting the attention of these powerful actors, her organization is not active there anymore. She says they don't have the time and energy and, for them, it's more important to be able to ensure the safety of people within the organization:

> We chose to keep a low profile on [X] because we don't have the time or energy to fight against trolls. I am affected by what I see, how women are treated online. … I use [X] personally so I know how it works, and I don't want to expose us to that. I've seen people get threats and they don't have the energy anymore. We are a small organization and we need to think of our safety.

Speaking to Charlotte and Emma, such imagined attacks are clearly the reality for feminist organizations. Charlotte recalls an incident where an initiative by the organization was picked up and intentionally misinterpreted by anti-feminists:

> And this just turned into a Twitterstorm, every time we posted something there were 20 accounts that jumped on us with hate. It was right-wing extremists. Like, we just got these racist, transphobic comments, and also threats like 'someone should burn down [name of organization].'

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For this reason, similarly to Hannah, Charlotte and Emma are careful to use X only occasionally when they need to reach the media and politicians. Emma explains how it just doesn't feel productive for them to post on X:

> [X] is just a space that we avoid because the tone is just so … difficult. It's like, a large part of Swedish X users are far-right groups and other extreme people, it just feels sometimes like it's not worth the effort, we will get stuck with a lot of crap to handle. So, at times we just don't use it. … But then something gets lost too, because people who might not follow us on Instagram or Facebook, but follow us on Twitter, they will not see it. … But I don't know, Twitter has not done enough to get rid of the most hateful accounts, the worst parts like the Nazis, they've been allowed to thrive there . . .

In these ways, feminist silences online are both about action and deliberate non-action. These measures are necessary tools for feminists to employ in the face of threats of online misogyny, hateful comments, and trolling attacks. Used both to maintain constructive online conversations and to conserve energy and care for the personal safety of employees, practices of silence do not mean backing down or pulling back from social media.

On top of the public activity that the participants perform on platforms, some also talked to me about feminist conversations, resource-sharing, and networking activities that they do in the non-public social media spaces. Like the many petitions for change that were initiated in Sweden in relation to #MeToo that made use of non-public features of social media (Hansson, Sveningsson, and Ganetz 2021), activists and organizations take to direct messages to mobilize and strategize. FemGroup puts a lot of effort into networking with other feminists to keep updated and share resources. In these ways, they find X extremely valuable:

> We might have followed the account for a while, and we trust it, before we contact them with a direct message. They might have posted an interesting tweet that raises questions that are not appropriate to ask on public Twitter, or that we could have posted publicly but we want to create a personal relationship with that organization, and they can answer in a more elaborate way in a DM.

These feminist undercurrents that run through the non-public spaces of social media thus play a part in feminist organizing. Additionally, they might fulfill some parts of the techno-optimistic democratic promises of social media. In the same vein as FemGroup, Felicia tells me about her private Messenger group that she has with female friends, which has been a source of many feminist conversations:

> I still think, although in some ways I hate social media and I think it's healthy to do that, that I had so many genuine conversations there. They've maybe taken place more in Messenger-groups … I would say they are sort of feminist groups because we talk about the difficulties of our personal lives and, they've been extremely valuable … they fill this role that salons once had, for democ-

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> racy, for consciousness-raising, because when you speak on something, you make it clearer for yourself too.

Feminist 'soft' practices of silence thus constitute ways to resist harmful online violence while still doing feminist work in public and non-public spaces online.

Conclusion

By performing soft feminist resistance online, activists carve out spaces within commercialized social media infrastructures where they can disseminate knowledge and visualize feminist futures. They go along with some characteristics of social media economies, like viral moments and hashtags, while resisting polarization and online misogynistic hate. By reappropriating hashtags, being a voice of reason, and using silence to counteract anti-feminist attacks, the participants in this study perform feminist resistance online in creative and ingenious ways. I argue that these soft feminist resistance practices are just as important as more obvious digital resistance like "feminist digilante" or alternative platform-building when introducing feminist ideas to new publics or producing safe online environments for feminist organizing, strategizing, and mobilizing. They are productive ways of doing feminism in a marketized economy of visibility where social media platforms automatically sort and structure online discourse.

Finally, it is important to note that some participants did feel silenced by the threat of online violence, which indicates that there is still much work for platforms to do to ensure their users' safety. Most of my interviewees work professionally with feminist advocacy online. Although their organizations vary in size and resources, they do have the opportunity and means to strategize, and they have the support of their employers. Individual activists, especially those who are marginalized, might have much fewer opportunities to strategize and significantly fewer resources to counteract and protect themselves from online violence. As the participants in this study still feel they need to avoid a particular platform due to threats of online hate, that risk is probably much higher for members of marginalized groups.

Biography

Lisa Lindqvist is a fourth-year PhD Candidate in Sociology, specializing in Gender Studies, at Karlstad University, Sweden. With a decade-long professional background in digital communications, where she noticed the inequitable access to meaningful online speaking opportunities, her research is now motivated by a critical examination of this disparity. Her research interests include digital politics, protest, and culture, with a specific focus on Swedish social media feminism.

Notes

1. Rosalind Gill and other scholars suggest that we might be living in a postfeminist moment, structured by neoliberal feminist iterations gain-

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ing visibility online (see Banet-Weiser, Gill, and Rottenberg 2020 for discussion).

2. The term "soft resistance" has been used by scholars to describe covert practices of, for instance, developers or user experience designers that aim to improve tech products or company cultures in subtle ways in accordance with justice or equality values (see for example Wong 2021). This is how I use the term here. However, it is important to point out that in recent years, the phrase has been used by the Hong Kong government to describe acts of resistance by citizens and media outlets, which are said to belong to the "ideological realm" (Global Voices 2023).

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Un Ego au féminin: Gender and Power in Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche's *Histoire de ma vie*

Lynda Chouiten

Abstract

Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche scholars tend to victimize her, underscoring her submission to the patriarchal order, embodied chiefly through her husband Belkacem and the most famous of her sons, the poet Jean Amrouche, under whose instigation she wrote her autobiography, *Histoire de ma vie*. The purpose of this article is to refute such a reading by arguing that this autobiography challenges, rather than complies with, the patriarchal code. Instead of lamenting her poor luck or accepting her condition as a subaltern, the author seeks various empowering compensations, whether they be her advantageous looks, her education and ease with the French language—a rare asset in her time—or a set of idiosyncratic rhetorical strategies. These strategies include an intensive recourse to the trope of appropriation through the use of the possessive adjective "*mon*" (my) and verbs expressing agency and strong will. Simultaneously, Amrouche rejects features supposed to be intrinsic in women's writing, such as subjecttivity, modesty, and meekness of tone, displaying instead both pride and assertiveness. Finally, one major technique deployed by this autobiographer is the reversal of the traditional gender schema through feminizing male characters, particularly her husband and her father-in-law, while endowing women like her mother and herself with the "male" traits of courage and both physical and moral resilience.

Key words: Autobiography, Discursive Strategies, Gender, Power; Fadhma Aïth Mansour

Introduction

In the realm of literary criticism, Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche's *Histoire de ma vie* has been given little attention. While homage is regularly paid to this author in Algerian newspapers and magazines, academic analyses of the book remain scarce, and critics often dismiss the text as no more than an unsophisticated testimony of the harsh life of Kabyle women within their patriarchal culture (cf. Gans-Guinoune 2009, 67; Kassoul 1999). Although some critics, including the famous Algerian writer Kateb Yacine, applaud Am-

rouche's autobiography as an act of anti-patriarchal resistance, refusing silencing and objectification, other scholars tend to portray her as a victim, emphasizing her submission to the patriarchal order, as represented by her husband Belkacem and the most famous of her sons, the poet Jean Amrouche. The purpose of this article is to argue not only that *Histoire de ma vie* challenges, rather than complies with, the patriarchal code, but that the text attempts to go beyond the denunciation of female oppression; rather, Amrouche's narrative constructs the author, Fadhma, and her mother, Aïni (who seems to be her only role model), as powerful female figures who display superiority in their physical appearance and endurance, intellect, and moral worth.

The essay will show how the autobiography departs from the features traditionally associated with feminine writing. Linguists and critics treating different geographical areas and historical periods have identified subjectivity, meekness, and an apologetic tone as markers of women's speech or texts. Robin Lakoff argues that social norms compel women to express themselves in a manner that displays uncertainty and lack of confidence and "den[ies] her the means of expressing herself strongly" (1973, 48). Lakoff holds that both the way women use language and the way they are represented disempowers them by confining them to "subservient functions" (46). Although the focus of the linguist's study is women's speech, several specialists of women's literature have shown that these characteristics apply to women's literature as well, a literature defined as "[*une*] *parole timorée, non assertive* … hypercorrection], *peur des mots*" (timorous, non-assertive speech [characterized by] hypercorrection, fear of words) (Yaguello ctd. in Bacali 2016, 422). Illustrating this statement, Elaine Showalter reveals the way 19th century female writers like Margaret Oliphant adopted a meek tone, "preaching submission and self-sacrifice, and … denouncing female self-assertiveness" (1977, 21). These traits, and indeed a pronounced tendency for self-humiliation, are also present in the texts of Marie-Claire Tremblay and Léonise Valois, two early 20th century Canadian writers whose diaries have been analyzed by Manon Auger. Unlike this seemingly generalized tendency, this article will show that the author of *Histoire de ma vie* opts for an assertive stance, substituting pride for meekness and self-deprecation.

Considered one of the earliest Algerian female writers, Fadhma Aïth Mansour (1982-1967) is a highly respected literary figure. Her name is often mentioned with Assia Djebar and pioneering male authors like Mouloud Feraoun and Kateb Yacine. While sharing with these authors a linguistic and cultural hybridity produced by the influence of the colonial school and which is the mark of Algerian literature—and indeed of postcolonial literature, more generally[1]—Amrouche presents a distinct characteristic: she was Christian, converting to Christianity at the age of 16, and the wife of another Christian convert, Belkacem Amrouche. In Algeria, a predominantly Muslim country, her Christian religion and her illegitimacy make her respectable social status in Algeria somewhat surprising.

The unconventional couple she formed with Belkacem gave birth to Jean El Mouhoub and Taos: Jean became a poet, and Taos was a novelist as well as

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a diva. While celebrated as the mother of these two renowned literary figures, Aïth Mansour Amrouche deserves recognition for her own ability to deal successfully with her multifaceted marginality. A poor female child born to an unmarried mother in an Algeria that had undergone colonial domination for decades,[2] she relied on the assets she had—good looks, education, and her own moral strength and determination—to empower herself; and, emulating her no less admirable mother, Aïni, she turned the colonial situation that was supposed to suppress her into a means of self-affirmation. Aïni and Fadhma found the colonial school and the Christian religion to be paths to liberation and empowerment. This article will examine the process of self-empowerment by focusing on the way the literary work deconstructs traditional assumptions about gender roles and female traits. With this goal in mind, the discussion that follows will address Fadhma's portrayal of her mother and the education bestowed on her, her account of her relationship with her husband, Belkacem (one in which she assigns to herself the tasks of planning and deciding), and the self-empowering strategies she deploys throughout her autobiography, which include a recurrent use of the possessive "my" and verbs conveying agency such as "to decide," "to declare," or "to refuse," when speaking of herself.

As an autobiography, *Histoire de ma vie* is expected to propose a scrupulous compliance with what Philippe Lejeune has termed "the autobiographical pact" (*le pacte autobiographique*), according to which the autobiographer "*jure de dire la vérité, toute la vérité, rien que la vérité*" (swears to say the truth, all the truth, and nothing but the truth) (1975, 20). Few sources, apart from Taos Amrouche's autobiographical novel *Rue des Tambourins* (1960) are available to measure the degree of such compliance. Yet, regardless of the fact that the novel corroborates many episodes of Fadhma Aïth Mansour's narrative, this paper contends that what matters here is less "*la ressemblance au vrai*" (resemblance to the truth)[3] (Lejeune) than the author's discursive construction of her life and, more importantly, her personality.[4] If her narrative is a faithful rendering of reality, it also testifies to her strong and self-willed character. If, on the other hand, she was much less combative and assertive than her autobiography makes us believe, then her untruthful rewriting of herself in empowering terms is significant. In other words, regardless of whether it is part of a lived reality or a discursive product of fantasy, Fadhma Amrouche's self-portrayal as a proud and authoritative woman confirms a quest for self-empowerment.

It is a well-known fact that Amrouche[5] wrote *Histoire de ma vie* at the urging of her son, Jean, who believed that her exceptional life story should be known. This detail has often been read as evidence that the mother's only wish in writing the book was to satisfy her son's request, and that she wrote the manuscript exclusively for her children with no thought to see it published. Nathalie Malti, in particular, argues that Fadhma Amrouche's letter to Jean displays the all-too-female apologetic tendency to consider women's stories worthless and that it bears the mark of woman's subaltern status in traditional Maghrebi society (2006, 137). Karin Holter holds a similar view, arguing that the insertion of Jean's request in the eventually published manuscript functions as a pre-text that legitimizes the publication of a woman's narrative in a culture where female

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discourse is supposed to be confined to the realm of the domestic and the private (1998, 57). Through such arguments, these critics represent Fadhma Amrouche as a submissive woman who chose to accommodate, rather than subvert, patriarchy. Yet the very letter used by Malti to support her reading clearly contradicts this. Indeed, agreeing with her son's idea that her story deserves to be told, the mother-author proceeds to give instructions concerning how the book should be published and how any financial profit resulting from the anticipated publication should be divided between her children:

> *Si j'ai écrit cette histoire, c'est que j'estime qu'elle mérite d'être connue de vous.*
>
> *Je voudrais que tous les noms propres (si jamais tu songes à en faire quelque chose) soient supprimés et si tu en fais un roman, que les bénéfices soient partagés entre tes frères et ta sœur, en tenant compte de tes frais et de ton travail.*
>
> (If I have written this story, it is because I think that it deserves to be known by you.
>
> If you ever envisage doing something with it, I would like all proper nouns to be erased; and if you make it into a novel, I would like the profit you get from it to be shared between your brothers and sister, taking into account the money and efforts it will have cost you). (Aïth Mansour 2009, 19)

Not only is the first sentence in the quotation a departure from women's usual humble tone—Amrouche does consider her story interesting—but it also questions the idea that it is to comply with her son's request that the mother wrote the autobiography. Instead, it presents the author as a full agent of both the decision to write and the act of writing. The introductory line is followed by even more strong-willed instructions, which could be provided only by a woman who had the ambition to make her narrative public. The intention to get the manuscript published is further confirmed by the fact that Fadhma Amrouche did not give up on this project, left unfulfilled at her son's death because of her husband's strong opposition. Instead, she confided the text to her daughter Taos, who carried out the project in 1968.

The passage quoted above nicely summarizes the aspects of *Histoire de ma vie* that this article seeks to highlight. While the autobiographer's will-to-power is signaled through her ambition to become a published writer—and also, though this is secondary, possibly to amass financial gain as a result of this—the fact that she gives precise instructions regarding these two matters reveals some of the empowering discursive techniques deployed in her narrative as a whole. Along with the use of the "I would like" form illustrated in the passage, the discussion below, particularly the last section, will underscore other such strategies, including a boastful tone at odds with the premise of female modesty and a quest for "cold" objectivity that departs from so-called feminine sensitivity. The remaining parts of the essay will address other aspects of the interaction between gender and power, namely the intervention of colonialism in the

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indigenous female's struggle against patriarchy and the gender reversal that marks Amrouche's rendering of male/female relationships.

The Heroic Mother and Colonial "Providence"

It is impossible to talk about Fadhma Amrouche without evoking her mother, Aïni. In a conservative culture—even more conservative and morally stricter than the rest of Algeria (Lacoste-Dujardin 1994, 22)[6]—where both the adulterous woman and her illegitimate daughter could have been sentenced to death, Aïni not only makes the courageous decision of keeping her child, but also fights unflinchingly to protect her from the harassment to which their malevolent environment constantly subjects them. Even prior to the birth—and even conception—of Fadhma, this combative woman resists the *diktat* of the tradition which expects widows to return to their parents' homes, deciding, at the age of 22, to remain in her deceased husband's place and raise her two sons alone.[7] When, later, she "sins" with a young neighbor and gives birth to his daughter, her impulse is to protect the child by suing the father to compel him to admit his paternity. This is not an easy task; as Denise Brahimi notes, she had to make the several-hour journey to the tribunal on foot and in every sort of weather, returning there as many times as required (1995, 19). She loses the court case, however, and in one brief moment of despair, plunges the infant into icy water, only to regret her action and immediately pull her from the water. The child, proving to be as tough-skinned as her mother, survives.

Aïni's rare courage has been unanimously emphasized by critics. While Denise Brahimi calls her "*une femme libre," "[u]ne très fière jeune femme, incroyable de courage et d'intrépidité*" (a free woman, a very proud young woman, whose courage and intrepidity are unbelievable) (18), Karen Holter notes the contrast between the portraits of "*une mère virile et combative et [un] père lié, lâche* …" (a virile and combative mother and a cowardly father, bound by convention) (1998, 60), a gender reversal which, as will be developed in other sections, marks several parts of Fadhma Amrouche's narrative. In the case of Amrouche's mother, this gender reversal is conveyed through her own, oft-repeated self-masculinizing sentence: "*Ticert-iw xir t'mira gergazen*!" (The tattoos I have on my chin are better than men's beards) (Aïth Mansour 63). Indeed, Aïni displays both physical resilience and moral stamina when, bringing up her children alone, she has to plough her fields, grind wheat and acorn into flour, and saw wood, among so many other tasks.

In "Berber Dreams, Colonialism, and Couscous," Carolyn Duffey infers that *Histoire de ma vie* reads like a traditional tale—of the sort Taos Amrouche, Fadhma's daughter, would later record in her collection *Le Grain magique* (1966). It would be more accurate, however, to refer to Amrouche's autobiography as a feminist rewriting of traditional tales. While such tales usually feature male heroes fighting a formidable ogress, the first part of Amrouche's narrative revolves around "a heroic single mother in a small Muslim village" (Duffey 1995, 71), that is, a female heroine struggling against a mighty patriarchal ogre. The portrayal of Aïni departs from the traditional representation of female characters in both Berber and Western tales, where the heroine is a passive, if beauti-

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ful, young woman. Although Fadhma Amrouche insists on her mother's beauty, what is poignant in the narrative is her courage, pride, and physical endurance. It is precisely these features that entitle her life story to be classed in what Northrop Frye has termed "the high mimetic mode"—a literary mode characterized by a hero(ine) superior in degree to other men, but not to his/her environment (Frye 2000, 33-34). But while, in making her fit within this category, the harshness of the Kabyle society where Aïni's life evolves prepares her for a tragic fate, there is a sort of "Providence" that rescues her from a terrible fate and brings her close to the heroes of an even higher mode, which Frye terms "romance." In epics and fairy tales, the hero's bravery and courage are able to defeat his wanton enemies only thanks to the help of a miraculous set of favorable circumstances, which can take the shape of a god, a fairy, or any other supernatural intervention (Frye 33).

In the case of Amrouche's mother, this "providential help" manifests itself through the presence of the colonial administration, without which the undeniable bravery she displays in refusing to yield to the patriarchal order would have been mercilessly crushed. Before seizing colonial justice to get her child's father to recognize his paternity, the courageous mother had already resorted to it to prevent her in-laws from chasing her away from her deceased husband's property and sending her back to her parents' home. The French authorities decreed that the widow may continue to live in her husband's house with her children. Similarly, it is the colonial administration that protects her and her daughter's life following the scandal of Aïni's "sinful" pregnancy. As Karin Holter writes: "*Sans ces magistrats montant au village … 'décrétant que personne ne devrait toucher à la veuve ni aux orphelins', il n'y aurait pas eu de Fadhma Amrouche, pas d'histoire douloureuse à raconter… En tant que femme, la mère de Fadhma, a été mieux servie par la justice de l'Etranger que par celle des siens*" (Were it not for those magistrates, who came up to the village with the decree that nobody should harm the widow or her orphans, there would have been no Fadhma Amrouche and no painful story to tell ... As a woman, Fadhma's mother was better helped by the Outsider's justice than by that of her own people) (59-60). Later, when the "child of sin" is, in her early years, snubbed and harassed because of her illegitimate birth, her devoted mother turns to another colonial institution for protection. She sends Fadhma to the neighboring region of Ouadhias to be educated by the *Sœurs Blanches*—nuns who, in several parts of colonial Algeria, provided education to indigenous children.

Much has been written about the complicity that brings colonialism and patriarchy together and the double yoke to which these twin systems of oppression subject women. In her famous "Can the Subaltern Speak?" for example, Gayatri Spivak fustigates both Indian nationalists and British colonizers for their silencing of the Indian woman, and casts irony at the British claim of "saving brown women from brown men" (1994, 92). The aid provided to Aïni by the colonial administration seems to contradict such accusations and legitimizes the colonial mission of rescuing the poor, oppressed Muslim woman from the tyranny of her people. Yet what appears to be a noble gesture was probably a calculated move meant to win over those marginalized in their own Algerian

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environment to French culture—which indeed seems to happen as Aïni, wanting to spare her daughter the harsh condemnation of her society, confides her education to *les Sœurs*. Ironically, these supposedly morally superior educators reveal their cruelty when they inflict on little Fadhma a most cruel and humiliating punishment.[8] With her characteristic pride and determination, Aïni withdraws her daughter from the religious school in Ouadhias as soon as she discovers the ill-treatment the child has undergone.

The Mirror and the Book

Amrouche's recording of the above incident and several other comments in *Histoire de ma vie* show that she is as aware of the colonizers' injustices as of the narrow-mindedness of her own people. As Duffey argues, this author "accepts neither set of influences [French and Berber] unquestionably, often providing an oblique criticism of each" (71). For example, she criticizes the racist tendency of the French to ostracize all those who are not French-born, writing that she has always remained the "petite indigène" (the little native). This prejudice toward Algerians manifests itself in two contradictory ways. If, in the orphanage of Taddert-Oufella, the too-strong presence of indigenous pupils is "remedied" by giving these pupils Christian names, thus creating the illusion that all the students at the school are European/Christian, those in charge of the Aïth-Manegueleth hospital do just the opposite. Claiming that Fadhma cannot have a Christian name because she has not been baptized, they strip her of the name that she was given in Taddert-Oufella—Marguerite—and give her the dreary, because marginalizing, name of "Fadhma from Tagmount."

Yet no less obvious than Amrouche's alertness to the inequities of the colonial educational system is her awareness of its empowering potential. Fadhma Amrouche's attachment to books would sustain her during her difficult life. Although the imperative of taking care of her home and her several children makes reading impossible for a while, she resumes this activity as soon as her children begin to grow up. "*J'avais recommencé à lire*," she writes, "*Paul m'apportait des livres de la Bibliothèque Populaire*" (I had resumed reading. Paul brought me books from the Public Library) (Aïth Mansour 165). These books, which are to her an obvious source of pleasure, are also useful in that they allow her to help her children—two of whom would become outstanding literary figures—with their studies. In the case of Paul, her eldest son, it is with undisguised pride that she writes that her help has contributed to making him a brilliant pupil: "*En littérature, j'avais pu aider Paul: il eut en octobre une très bonne note … Il fut reçu et même accepté à l'Ecole Normale d'Instituteurs*" (I was able to help Paul with his literature; in October, he obtained a very good grade and was admitted to the Teacher Training College) (Aïth Mansour 165). Needless to say, while thus empowering her children, education empowered the mother as well by enabling her to write her autobiography and, through this, to attain fame. As Julia Clancy-Smith states, "the 'child of sin' not only survived but also rose to fame and posterity thanks to modern schooling" (2016, 213).

Perhaps surprisingly for a woman of her time, Amrouche's attachment to books went hand in hand with a strong attachment to modernity and Western

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ways. Unlike her husband—who, notwithstanding his French education and his being Christian, unflinchingly sticks to his Kabyle *chéchia* (traditional headgear worn in Muslim countries) despite long years of exile in Tunis—she goes through the streets of the Tunisian capital city bare-headed and dressed *à l'européenne*. As long as the family lives in European districts, this does not cause any problem, for she is mistaken for "*la Française mariée à un Arabe*" (the Frenchwoman who married an Arab) (Aïth Mansour 172). However, when the Amrouches move to a richer but Arab-populated part of the city, the author understands that her sartorial behavior is viewed with disfavour: "*chez ces gens, une femme indigène qui sort, le visage découvert devant des hommes, n'était pas une femme honnête*" (for these people, a native woman who goes unveiled in men's presence was not an honest woman) (172). Her refusal to renounce her Western clothes in spite of this realization reveals her loyalty to this form of dress as a mark of liberation. Through it, Fadhma Amrouche seems to affirm her freedom from what she perceives to be indigenous women's life of subjection.

More than *Histoire de ma vie*, it is *Rue des tambourins* (1960), an autobiographical novel by Taos Amrouche (Fadhma's daughter), which highlights Fadhma Amrouche's abhorrence of traditions. Taos's novel poignantly depicts the fierce quarrels between her parents concerning their daughter's education. In particular, the novel recounts how the father is strongly opposed to his daughter's wearing (what he considers to be) short dresses, which her mother wants her to wear. The novel teems with other examples that show the mother violently rejecting tradition by despising indigenous medicine, refusing to journey back to her husband's native village, discouraging her eldest son from marrying a woman from the village and, when he does, displaying overt hostility to her fragile and submissive daughter-in-law.

Amrouche fustigates not only indigenous women who remain imprisoned within the walls of tradition, but also those Western wives who get trapped in a patriarchal spiral imposed by an Oriental partner. Both *Rue des tambourins* and *Histoire de ma vie* mention a Sicilian woman who meekly accepts her subjection to a Muslim husband. The tone of the author's judgment of this couple is imbued with a mixture of condemnation of the man, compassion for the woman, and contempt and a sense of superiority toward both. Indeed, although an indigenous woman herself, her own relationship with her husband is clearly more "horizontal"; in Clancy-Smith's words, "she and Belkacem [her husband] lived as a 'modern' couple, as that notion was understood at that time" (212). In a sense, her passing as a European woman by donning Western clothes while letting her partner ostensibly retain his *chéchia* as a mark of his indigenousness legitimized the equal treatment (indeed, as will be discussed below, the gender reversal) she demanded of her husband, compensating as it did for her female condition by a borrowed Westernness which, in the colonial context of that time, was perceived as a power signifier.

However, it is possible to think that Fadhma's empowerment within the Amrouche couple included not only her way of dressing but also her own physical appearance. In a manner that departs strikingly from the female traditional requirement of modesty—in both its meanings of humility and abstaining from

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showing one's physical assets—the author of *Histoire de ma vie* unabashedly insists on her own beauty, perhaps somewhat exaggerating her looks. Indeed, as Duffey notes, Amrouche's description of herself as blond is hardly credible, since all the pictures of her in the book seem to belie it, and might well be inspired by "a French source"—that is, the influence of French texts (Duffey 72). Such an attitude betrays an inferiority complex reminiscent of the one analyzed by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*. As a colonized woman, Amrouche interiorized European standards as a mark of superiority in terms of beauty and replaced the quest for whiteness, which characterizes Fanon's Antilleans (see Fanon 1993, 37-79), with an aspiration for European blondness.

Whether blond or not, Amrouche does not hesitate to refer to herself as "*la plus jolie fille du village*" (the prettiest girl in the village) (63), cruelly passing negative judgments on those young women less endowed by nature.[9] Her good looks were perhaps an important asset to her in her sometimes-stormy relationship with her husband, Belkacem.

Wearing the Pants

One interesting point in *Histoire de ma vie* is the way the author refers to her husband. At a time when Kabyle husbands and wives used euphemisms such as "*amɣhar/tamɣart*" (old man/old woman) to refer to each other, Amrouche invariably called her companion either "*mon mari*" (my husband) or by his first name, Belkacem. Susanne Heiler notes that this manner is at odds with the imperative of reserve at the heart of Kabyle customs, and concludes that it must have led to the husband's refusal to see the manuscript published (1998, 90). In addition, the emphatic use of the possessive adjective "*mon*" betrays an obvious will-to-self-assertion.

This attitude does not herald a posture of submission of the sort attributed to Fadhma Mansour by Nathalie Malti in *Voix, mémoire et écritur*e. In line with her representation of Fadhma Amrouche as a victim of age-old patriarchy, Malti writes that Amrouche was a patient and resigned "*mère de sept enfants [qui] n'a eu ni le loisir ni l'énergie de s'opposer directement au pouvoir des hommes*" (mother of seven children who had neither the time nor the energy to openly confront men's power) (148-149). Yet if the precarious social condition that Amrouche endured most of her life made patience imperative, her text shows that she was anything but submissive and that she certainly never lacked the "energy" to speak her mind to her husband. Again, more than *Histoire de ma vie*, *Rue des tambourins* describes the tempestuous arguments between Yemma (the heroine's mother, who stands for Fadhma Amrouche) and both her husband and her mother-in-law (referred to as Gida, meaning "grand-mother"). While the mother is portrayed as a harsh and uncompromising woman, the father—Yemma's husband—is a weary man, rendered both fragile and helpless by his wife's fiery complaints and long lapses of disparaging silence. For the patriarchal environment in which the family is supposed to be, the powerless and somewhat self-effacing man is oddly torn between two imposing women: a Muslim mother who stands for the traditional order of things and a Christian, fairly Western-

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ized, wife who often despises all that her mother-in-law defends. Instances of Fadhma's contempt for tradition have already been discussed in this paper.

This quarrel over the education and the future of one's children is not unusual in "modern" couples, but the fact that the wife's voice is so loud in an early 20th century Kabyle family is most surprising. Fadhma Amrouche rejects the respectful obedience which, according to Kabyle tradition, women owe both the head of the household and his mother. As an illegitimate child growing up in a conservative cultural world, Mrs. Amrouche should have felt this imperative all the more acutely; yet this is not the case. She never looks at her husband as the savior rescuing her from shame and granting her respectability; she sees him as an equal, and even this is an understatement. Indeed, she does not only have her say in questions that relate to her children; as Duffey argues, "she is most certainly her mother's daughter. She makes most of the family decisions" (76), including those pertaining to her husband's own career. When, hoping for a better salary, Belkacem Amrouche wishes to work as a schoolteacher, it is his wife who writes a pathetic application letter on his behalf. Later, as the Amrouche family's finances deteriorate alarmingly, it is again she who urges him to seek employment somewhere else so he might feed his wife and children. Fadhma Amrouche is also in charge of the household finances whenever times are hard and belt-tightening is required. While her several friends, mostly members of religious institutions, help her with donations that include clothes and furniture, little is said of Belkacem's contacts and friendships. In a sense, she is thus also responsible for what might be called the household's "foreign affairs." Belkacem, on the other hand, does not disdain the use of a broom or even a mop to clean the floor (204). Writing of the house they built in Ighil-Ali, Amrouche writes that "*son mari en avait fait un bijou*" (her husband had made a jewel of it) (207), thus emulating the most dutiful wives.

Although Amrouche does fulfill traditionally feminine tasks such as cooking and knitting, the fact that she is the one who runs the family affairs and makes all the important decisions presents her as a masculinized figure, her good looks notwithstanding. On the other hand, her husband, who tends to be passive and altogether powerless in the face of his strong-willed wife, is somewhat feminized. This reversed gender schema is not specific to the Fadhma and Belkacem Amrouche couple. As soon as she arrives in her in-laws' house, the author of *Histoire de ma vie* notices that all the power—and indeed, all the wealth—lies in the hands of the wife of her husband's grandfather: "*On me présenta Thaidhelt, la femme du grand-père de Thizi Aïdhel, gardienne de la maison et de l'argent de l'aïeul. C'était elle qui avait le commandement de toute cette famille*" (I was introduced to Thaidhelt, the grandfather's wife. A native of Thizi Aïdhel, she is the guardian of her husband's house and money. It was she who commanded all this family" (Aïth Mansour 90, my emphasis). The weak and too easy-going father-in-law, Ahmed, depends on this woman both financially and for household affairs. Commenting on this character, Susanne Heiler writes that "*il manque de virilité masculine*" (he lacks masculine virility) and that the dominance of the feminine element in him increases as he becomes more and more financially dependent on his stepmother (102).

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Heiler further argues that the feminine and masculine poles are also opposed to each other through the mother, Aïni, and her house, on the one hand, and the in-laws' house, on the other. The in-laws strike Fadhma Amrouche as a lot of idle good-for-nothings, in contrast to her mother's heroic resilience and hard work. The house of the industrious Aïni is "*pleine, nette, propre, le sol comme les murs, tout était blanchi et tenu avec amour*" (full, clean and tidy, and everything in it—the ground and the walls—was whitewashed and lovingly taken care of) (88); by contrast, in addition to being "*vide*" (empty) (88), that of the Amrouche family is "*très grande mais sale, le sol en terre battue, rugueux comme au premier jour de la construction, les murs noirs de suie n'avaient pas été blanchis depuis l'origine*" (very large but dirty; the clay ground was as rough as on the day when the house was built, and the walls, black with soot, had not been whitewashed since that first day) (104). The paternal, and therefore masculine, pole (that of the father-in-law) is thus associated with failure, laziness, and dirt while the maternal, feminine pole (that of the mother), to which the autobiographer's preference obviously goes, is represented in valorizing terms evoking cleanness, wise management, perseverance, and prosperity. Because passivity and weakness of both body and spirit are usually seen as female as opposed to manly strength and good sense, this binary representation of the maternal and paternal poles reverses, again, the traditional gender definitions. Simultaneously, it is possible to argue that this valorization of the feminine bears a feminist agenda in that it celebrates woman's mental and physical power.

Empowering Words

One of the rare instances where Amrouche yields to her husband's will relates to his objection to having her autobiography published.[10] Interestingly, however, the author of *Histoire de ma vie* presents this accommodating gesture less as an act of submission to male authority than a concession made not to hurt or sadden a beloved one. In her epilogue, she writes: "*j'essayai de l'ouvrir [le cahier contenant le récit autobiographique] à Ighil-Ali, en 1953; mais je compris que cela déplaisait au Papa, et, comme je ne voulais pas le chagriner, je remis le cahier dans son tiroir dont, seul, il avait la clef pendue à la chaîne de sa montre*" (In Ighil-Ali, I tried to open the notebook containing the autobiographical narrative; but I saw that this did not appeal to Papa [her husband], and as I did not want to sadden him, I put the notebook back in the drawer to which only he had the key) (Aïth Mansour 199). This formulation, which might as well have been that of a considerate husband wishing to preserve a gentle wife's feelings, confirms our reading of the Fadhma/Belkacem relationship as a reversal of the usual gender schema. With more relevance to the present part of the discussion, Amrouche's self-writing as a strong but benign partner rather than an obedient wife is also indicative of the way the author makes use of words in such a way as to craft an empowering rhetoric challenging the imperative of meekness that the patriarchal code is wont to impose on women.

Amrouche's empowering discursive strategies include a recurrent trope of appropriation. As a lonely schoolgirl in Taddert-Oufella, young Fadhma often finds the readings to which her education gave her access helpful in her soli-

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tude. Emulating other famous literary loners, including Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the fictional Robinson Crusoe, she finds solace in the company of nature, which she makes her own. This appropriating impulse is reflected in her repeated use of the possessive adjective "*mon*" (my), used particularly to refer to a brook in the vicinity of the school: "*mon ruisseau*" (my brook) (34). This impulse to appropriate the brook is not a singular case. The author of *Histoire de ma vie* makes a no less intensive use of the possessive adjective in phrases like "*mon mari*" (my husband) and "*mon argent*" (my money) (166)—the latter phrase being particularly surprising on the part of a woman who does not work outside the home and who, as such, cannot really be said to have any money of her own.

The writer's assertive manner further manifests itself through strong words which express authority and determination, and which befit her status as the chief decision-maker of her household. Repeatedly in the narrative, Amrouche writes "*je décidai*," "*je résolus*," "*je voulus*," "*je déclarai*," "*je refusai*," and "*mon parti fut pris*" (I decided, I resolved, I declared, I refused, and my resolution was taken). In all these cases, the use of the first-person singular pronoun reinforces the impression of power already created by verbs expressing strong will, seeming as it does to exclude Belkacem, the husband, from the realm of decision-making. It is interesting to contrast these words referring to Mrs. Amrouche to those describing her husband. Having urged him to leave his parents' home to seek a job that might sustain his family—his parents are on the verge of utter bankruptcy—the wife writes that "*il avait peur de l'inconnu, n'étant pas armé pour la lutte*" and that "*son regard [était] désespéré*" (he was afraid of the unknown, for he was not armed for struggle and he had a desperate look) (132). After his actual departure, she adds: "*J'ai su depuis que, jusqu'à la gare, mon mari n'avait cessé de pleurer*" (I learnt, after his departure, that my husband had cried all the way to the station) (133). In another instance, she comments on her son Paul's decision to emigrate to France, thus following her advice rather than that of his father, who wants him to settle in his father's homeland: "*il fallut longtemps à mon mari pour digérer sa défaite*" (It took my husband a long time to swallow his defeat) (180). While associating Belkacem with words evoking tears and fear—two traditionally feminine attributes—partakes in his already discussed feminization, the impulse to "pacify" him (suggested in the word "*défaite*") is reflected in the very syntactic category within which the author locates him. As illustrated by the examples given above, Fadhma Amrouche represents herself as the maker of her own destiny by referring to herself through verbs suggesting or anticipating action; by contrast, her husband is associated either with nouns or adjectives, which, as such, evoke passivity and lack of agency.

The question of gender being at the core of this discussion, it would be interesting to compare Amrouche's writing to what is usually termed "female writing." I have already argued that this writer departs from the attitude of meekness and modesty usually expected from women. Her tone is often one of pride—and not only in her good looks. One oft-quoted line in the narrative is an exchange with Father Carisson when he suggests that she work as a maid for an administrator: "*je ne serai jamais la bonne de personne, surtout en pays kabyle*" (I'll never be anybody's maid—and certainly not in Kabylia) (81). Similarly, she

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abstains from so-called feminine outbursts of emotions and lyrical surges. Indeed, as Susanne Heiler notes, "*[e]n général, Amrouche a tendance à mettre en avant les événements … plutôt qu'analyser ses sentiments*" (as a rule, Amrouche tends to focus on events rather than analyze her feelings) (91). This refusal to indulge in pathos or a cathartic unleashing of her feelings, despite the suffering undoubtedly generated by her illegitimacy, poverty, and the numerous difficulties endured throughout her life, might be read as a wish to offer an image of a strong woman governed by reason and able to control her emotions.

Conclusion

The empowering potential of Amrouche's words is unleashed at the very moment she undertakes to write her autobiography. In a society where women are easily silenced, telling the story of one's life endows oneself with a voice; in this vein, Egyptian writer Nawal El Saadawi celebrates women's writing as an act of courageous resistance that kills oppression and injustice (cf. Malti 131). This essay has demonstrated that *Histoire de ma vie* is an act of resistance, and not only against patriarchy. Although, as Clancy-Smith reminds us, "Fadhma Amrouche … was more than thrice marginalized—as an ethnic minority (a Berber), a woman, convert, poor, and illegitimate" (204)—she lets none of these markers of disempowerment bend her decidedly assertive ego. Instead of lamenting her poor luck or accepting her condition as a subaltern, she seeks and finds various empowering compensations: her advantageous looks, her education and ease with the French language—a rare asset in her time—and a set of idiosyncratic rhetorical strategies. These strategies include an intensive recourse to the trope of appropriation through the use of the possessive adjective "*mon*" (my) and verbs expressing agency and strong will. Simultaneously, Amrouche rejects features supposed to be intrinsic in feminine writing, such as subjectivity, modesty, and meekness of tone, displaying both pride and assertiveness. Finally, one major technique deployed by this autobiographer is the reversal of the traditional gender schema, feminizing male characters, particularly her husband and her father-in-law, while endowing women like her mother and herself with the "male" traits of courage and both physical and moral resilience.

The contribution of this essay to scholarship is two-fold. On the one hand, it has filled a glaring gap in the literature devoted to Fadhma Aïth Mansour Amrouche, a literature which remains sparse. On the other hand, and on a broader scale, it has questioned the eternal victimization of women—particularly so-called "Third World women"—in scholarly discourse. Although the oppressiveness of patriarchy is not in doubt, it does not follow that all women passively yield to it as helpless sufferers. Because, despite having a hard time fighting the yoke of poverty, the autobiographer studied here effectively conquered both her illegitimate birth and the limitations of her female gender, her example sends a message to women that a refusal of subjection and a guiltless assertion of the self are likely to force respect and earn them recognition.

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Biography

Lynda Chouiten is a Professor of Literature in the Department of English at the University of Boumerdès (Algeria). Her PhD, awarded in 2013 by the National University of Ireland, Galway, was funded by the Irish Government under its PRTLI program. She is the editor of *Commanding Words: Essays on the Discursive Constructions, Manifestations, and Subversions of Authority* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016) and the author of *Isabelle Eberhardt and North Africa: A Carnivalesque Mirage* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015) as well as about 20 articles/book chapters. Chouiten is also a writer and a poet. So far, she has published two novels. *Le Roman des Pôv'Cheveux*, was on the short list of two prestigious prizes—*le Prix Mohammed Dib* and *L'Escale d'Alger*—in 2018, and *Une Valse* won the Assia Djebar Prize (*le Grand Prix Assia Djebar*) in 2019. Her first short story collection, *Des Rêves à leur portée*, was released in March 2022, while her first poetry collection (*J'ai Connu les déserts et autres poèmes*) was published in May 2023.

Notes

1. The hybridity that inevitably results from the contact between colonizers and colonized has been famously theorized by Homi K. Bhabha in his *The Location of Culture* (1994).
2. When Fadhma Aïth Mansour was born, Algeria had been colonized for 52 years, since the French occupation began in 1830; Kabylia, however, was only occupied in 1857. The Kabyles responded to this intrusion by a series of revolts, the most important one being that of 1871. The failure of this insurrection was followed by serious reprisals: the French arrested and exiled Algerian leaders, sentenced others to death, and massively confiscated the natives' lands. They further reinforced their domination by implementing secular and Catholic schools and by spreading colonial myths, like the so-called Kabyle Myth, according to which Kabyles are closer to Europeans than their "Arab" counterparts and, therefore, more prone to accepting the French presence and assimilating to French culture and values. For more on this, see (Direche 2007).
3. Translations are mine throughout.
4. In this connection, Lejeune argues that autobiography has both a historical and psychological dimension in that it relates to memory, self-representation, and self-analysis (1975).
5. Although the name indicated on the cover of *Histoire de ma vie* is Fadhma Aïth Mansour, I will, throughout this essay, refer to the author as "Fadhma Amrouche" or "Amrouche" for short, a name which seems to be both shorter and handier.
6. Only the conservatism of the Mzab region can equal that of Kabylia. In this latter region, women were confined to domestic chores and were denied the right to choose their husband or to inherit wealth or property (Lacoste-Dujardin 1994, 21).

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7. In traditional Kabyle society, widows were expected to return to their parents' home and leave their children to be raised by their deceased husband's family. The only alternative offered to a woman who wanted to keep her children was to marry her dead husband's brother, thus remaining with her in-laws (see Lacoste-Dujardin 2010-2011).
8. Accused of throwing thimbles in the outhouse, little Fadhma is violently whipped and covered with excrement.
9. The women pitilessly criticized for their looks include the "*très laide*" (very ugly) Yamina T'oulêla, a woman from Ighil-Ali (114), and Amrouche's hostess in Mekla, said to be "*d'une laideur impossible à décrire*" (ugly beyond description) (48).
10. Although several critics hold that this refusal is a manifestation of the patriarchal belief that woman's discourse should remain within the realm of the private and the domestic, it is legitimate to suppose that it is rather due to the not particularly flattering picture that the autobiographer draws of her weak husband, as the previous section details.

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Review of *Unshaved: Resistance and Revolution in Women's Body Hair Politics*, by Breanne Fahs

Emer O'Toole

Fahs, Breanne. *Unshaved: Resistance and Revolution in Women's Body Hair Politics*. (Seattle: Washington University Press, 2022), 308 pages.

When Breanne Fahs was still an undergraduate, she caused a campus furor by inviting the death row inmate Mumia Abu-Jamal to record a graduate address. The university put a stop to it, but Fahs and her co-conspirators played the address at the baccalaureate ceremony instead. For this action, they were nominated *Hustler Magazine*'s "Asshole of the Month" (*Unshaved* 252). Fahs' academic career has logically proceeded along this trajectory—she's biographer to Valerie Solanas, the woman who shot Andy Warhol; she writes on menstrual activism; on BDSM dynamics and the paradoxes of sexual liberation; on sex work; on radical histories; and even has a recent edited collection of feminist manifestos, subtly entitled *Burn It Down*. Fahs tells us in *Unshaved*, "I have written about many topics in my career, several of which are, in my view, more controversial, radical, political, and frankly risky than body hair, and yet body hair continues to be the topic that gets under the skin of misogynists with the greatest efficiency and speed" (251).

For over 15 years, Fahs has been offering students in some of her classes an extra credit assignment in which they can choose to grow out their body hair (for women), remove their body hair (for men), or get kind of gender fucky with the whole thing (for non-binary people). In 2014, the right wing US media got wind of this and went berserk. Fahs ended up on the receiving end of a barrage of violently homophobic and misogynistic hate mail and death threats. She underwent a security evaluation for her home and had all of her work e-mails reviewed by a team of experts (93).

This extraordinary capacity of body hair to provoke vitriol might surprise the uninitiated reader. But it did not surprise me, because, during a surreal period of my life circa 2011, I had my Warholian 15-minutes when I appeared on a British TV show, put my hands up in the air, aimed my (voluminous) underarm bush at the camera, and sang, "Get Your Pits Out For the Lads." Funny? Yes. Wise? No. As a global broken telephone reproduced the AMAZING TALE of the woman who does not shave, I found myself inexpertly navigating a media storm. Sometimes it was fun. Sometimes, men told me they wanted to

rape me with jagged sticks. In short, I know the stakes of being what Fahs terms a "body hair rebel."

In *Unshaved*, Fahs gives voice to dozens of body hair rebels—from the students who participated in her extra credit assignment, to artists both grassroots and establishment, to photographers and models, feminist activists, and a host of other women and non-binary people who choose—for reasons political, personal, aesthetic, environmental, economic, medical, or cultural—not to subscribe to the gendered double standard of compulsory female body hair removal. *Unshaved* documents the pleasure and joy of resistance, of freedom from social strictures, of ditching the discomfort of shaving, and of learning to love your hairy body. And it gives us the hard fucking grind of it all too—the stigma, the shame, the conflict, the professional penalties, and the abuse from strangers.

In my experience, when people are mad at you (whether in all caps or at the dinner table) because they do not like your armpits, a thing they often shout is, "THIS IS NOT IMPORTANT AND YOU SHOULDN'T CARE ABOUT IT." *Unshaved* makes the case that body hair scholarship and activism is not trivial, that, rather, body hair, "is the perfect site for exposing readers to the allure of social norms, the invisible workings of power, and the possibilities of resistance" (26). Hair, Fahs' research shows, is a material and philosophical tool for getting fish to understand they're wet. As Fahs asks, "What (*the fuck*) is going on when writing about body hair provokes responses like death threats and calls for my firing?" (24) She explains that the tension between body hair's seeming inconsequentiality and its intense, emotional social regulation animates every chapter in the book (25).

Unshaved does not lead, as you might expect it to, with a list of arguments or facts to elevate body hair to the status of Serious Political Concern™, but, rather, with a demonstration of the lacuna between how most people explain compulsory female hairlessness (i.e., personal choice) and what happens when they stop shaving. Fah's point that "something isn't really a choice if people can't choose to abstain from it" (21), is proven not rhetorically, but empathetically. When women were asked to imagine what it would be like to stop shaving, they sort of figured, NBD (no big deal). But the journals of those who undertook the assignment refute the idea of a neutral social space in which women freely choose what to do with their bodies. The students deal with shock, anger, disgust, discrimination, stigma, conflict, and, particularly for those in relationships with men, a host of extremely troubling intimate behaviours. Perhaps even more profound and difficult than these external factors, the women experience the extent of their own internalized shame, shame that prevents them from dressing as they like, moving as they like, interacting with others confidently, exercising, and experiencing sexual pleasure. Trivial stuff, clearly.

Drawing on body hair historian Rebecca Herzig, Fahs shows that disgust of female hair was deliberately manufactured by the razor company Gillette and fashion magazines in the 1920s for the profit of men. By the 1930s, female hair removal was a cultural norm in the USA and parts of Western Europe. We've

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naturalized it to the point where women who choose not to shave are considered freaks, but the Western norm of female hairlessness isn't even a century old. In a chapter on Chinese body hair activism—one of the most compulsively readable parts of the book—this history is given added significance. Fahs introduces us to the contemporary Chinese feminist movement through the story of five activists arrested for giving out stickers about sexual harassment on public transport. In 2014, just months after their release, three of the five women took part in an online armpit hair contest. They came up against many of the same body hair stigmas we've been discussing so far: shaming, disgust, trivialization. But what makes their action particularly interesting is that shaving has only been a social norm in China for one generation. Most of the competitors' mothers probably didn't shave. And, just like with Gillette in the '20s, the new norm was the result of an intentionally orchestrated, economically motivated campaign of stigmatizing women's bodies for profit. As Fahs explains, circa 2005, the Reckitt Benckiser Group aggressively promoted their product Veet in China through bathroom and subway ads, celebrity endorsements, social media campaigns, video games, and free samples on campuses. A company spokesperson told reporters, "It's not how much hair you have, it's how much you think you have. If your concern level is high enough, even one hair is too much" (*Unshaved* 166). (You know, I'm always kind of grateful when the bad guy says the quiet part out loud.) Reckitt Benckiser set out to instill shame and self-hatred in Chinese women, and it succeeded. When this continues to be the capitalist and neoliberal game-plan, Fahs' thesis that body hair is a powerful mode of resistance is granted increased urgency.

Men loom large in *Unshaved*. The accounts of the men who undertook Fahs' body hair assignment reveal that it's mainly the opinion of their male peers that matters to them. Conversely, in the female students' journals, as well as the interviews with body hair rebels that inform the third section of the book, men's approval, permission, reputation, and desire are inescapable, particularly for heterosexual women. The Irish writer Louise O'Neill once said, "the hardest place to maintain my feminism is in a relationship with a straight man" (Mullally 2019), and one of the things I appreciate about *Unshaved* is how it drives into this skid. It can be embarrassing for us, as feminists, to talk about the ways we capitulate to the men in our lives, the ways in which many of us sideline our politics and sacrifice our principles to accommodate men we care about. Sometimes I think that if the other feminists could see me folding laundry at 10pm while my Frenchman plays FIFA, they'd kick me out of the movement.

In the tales of shitty partners unable to see past body hair to the women they claim to love, or the stories of the men who fetishize the hair, I saw much of my own erstwhile experience as a hairy lady on the dating scene, managing expectations and egos. The extra credit assignment resulted in some break ups, and clearly helped some of Fahs' students to dodge a bullet. After my own rebellion, I also realized that body hair acts as a kind of asshole filter, syphoning off the men unable to do what I call "the work"—that is, to examine their internalized -isms, to pick apart the "common sense" prejudices of the world—from those whose hearts are supple and curious. The tales of boyfriends both

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shitty and unshitty made me remember dragging my Frenchman home from the bar on our second date, pouring him a whiskey, and asking, in bad French, "what do you think about women with body hair?" "I do' no. I never tried eet," he replied. (Reader: he tried eet.) He has continued to not give a fuck either way ever since. Body hair helped me to see something important about him from the get go, and I'm grateful for that. Even if he thinks his contribution to the laundry ends when he presses *Démarrer* on the dryer.

I can't do the scope of the book justice. The chapter on body hair zines is an unequivocal pleasure. And I loved learning about Pakistani American artist Ayqa Khan and her symbolically loaded cross-cultural pieces. I puzzled with Fahs over the politics of photographer Ben Hopper's portraits of conventionally gorgeous models with body hair. And I became more than just intellectually aroused googling Marilyn Minter's erotic photo series *Plush* to visually complement Fahs' loving analysis. I admired the light, confident touch with which Fahs uses Sara Ahmed on affect, Julia Kristeva on abjection, or Michel Foucault on biopower to undergird the intellectual aims of the study without sacrificing the reader's flow or her participants' voices. And I lauded the care and attention she gives to the heightened stakes of body hair rebellion for women of colour.

Do I have quibbles? Sure. I wasn't crazy about the repeated reference to a 2003 study linking shaving and deodorant use to breast cancer, as at least two subsequent meta-analyses have failed to bear out this finding. I wondered about the politics of leaving some of the more troubling testimony from study participants largely without critique, but then I get that we have to be careful with the the trust of people who agree to take part in our research.

I can't overstate how greatly I enjoyed *Unshaved*. Fahs writes that the actions of body hair rebels "serve as a reminder that the rules of the body are not really rules after all, that mandates for how women groom or look or behave can be undone and discarded, privately and publicly" (254). I've been a Fahsian body hair rebel for, God, 12 or 13 years now, and the political conviction and quest for personal freedom that inspired my original protest has faded into the background. My body hair, very gradually, with great effort at first, and then with no effort at all, became normal for me and those around me. This book reminded me that body hair continues to be "a sly indicator of—or litmus test of—feminist politics of the body" (44). I appreciate anew the freedom I've won and am proud of the permission my body—careening around a Brittany beach after two small boys—grants to other women. *Unshaved* reignited some of my feminist fire. May it kindle a similar spark in you.

Biography

Emer O'Toole is Associate Professor of Irish Performance Studies at Concordia University. She is author of the books *Contemporary Irish Theatre and Social Change* (Routledge 2023) and *Girls Will Be Girls* (Orion 2015), and co-editor of the book Ethical Exchanges (Rodopi 2017). Her scholarship has appeared in international peer-reviewed journals including *Éire-Ireland*; *Contemporary Theatre Review*; *LIT: Literature, Interpretation, Theory*; *Sexualities*; and *Target*. She contributes to publications including *The Guardian* and *The Irish Times*. Before her

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children came along and imprisoned her in the house, she made theatre. Now, on the rare occasion her captors are simultaneously asleep, she tries to write fiction.

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Errata
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Marginalization of the Global South

• p. 5 For "Late Syle" read "Late Style."

• p. 16 For "waste-pickers" read "waste pickers."

• p. 17 For "Alfredo Zaldivar " read "Alfredo Zaldívar."

• p. 17 For "*Periodo especial en tiempos de paz* " read "*Período especial en tiempos de paz."*

• p. 18 For "*Asociación Cubana de Artesano Artistas*" read "*Asociación Cubana de Artesanos Artistas.*"

• p. 19 For "In the Water with Inlé: Santeria's Siren Songs in the CircumCaribbean " read "In the Water with Inlé: Santería's Siren Songs in the CircumCaribbean."

• p. 56 For "Basel al-Araj " read "Bassel al-Araj."

• p. 57 For "Amilcar Cabral" read "Amílcar Cabral."

• p. 80 For "Recep Tayyip Erdogan's" read "Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's."

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