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Writing multi-vocal intersectionality in times of crisis

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Writing multi-vocal intersectionality in times of crisis

Abstract

This article is a multi-vocal account, a form of writing *differently*, which captures our changing lives and livelihoods under the present global health crisis. Through the process of writing, we create a safe space to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic exposes our gendered, intersectional lives. Our writing gives voice to suppressed thoughts and embodied affects as they surface in relation to entrenched structural inequalities where we witness the marginalisation of intersectional difference, in our case women, the feminine, and race in academia and neoliberal society. By rendering visible the structural inequalities that have become amplified during the pandemic, and the ways in which these inequalities have affected our everyday lives, we are able to give witness to intersectional differences. Our multi-vocal embodied text is offered as an emancipatory, affective mobilisation of our lives, encompassing feelings of grief, loss, fear, anger, frustration, and vulnerability. This collective piece of writing gives rise to solidarity in a crisis-stricken world where we choose to live with hope.

Keywords: intersectionality; inequality; academia; racism; writing

1. Beginning

Since 2020 opened its curtain, the globe seems to be on fire. The COVID-19 pandemic succeeds and aggravates pre-existing socio-economic crises. It has brought significant changes, which have further stressed already existing social inequalities and risks for the most vulnerable (Wasdani & Prasad, 2020). Health experts and governments have in many parts of the world sanctioned lockdown, quarantine and social distancing. Yet for certain populations, these recommendations are impossible, including those without a home (Mendes, 2020); those who are unable to distance oneself socially, for instance in some urban areas of the Global South (Wasdani & Prasad, 2020), and those providing front-line services without protective equipment. Privileged workers such as academics have been forced into homeworking and virtual working, dependent on indispensable digital interfaces (Gao & Sai, 2020a; Mandalaki & Daou, 2020). This way of living and working, in isolation and yet so often connected, has changed our relation to time and space as well as the ways we relate to each other personally, academically and socially (e.g., Boncori, 2020; Clancy, 2020; Plotnikof et al. 2020;). Many women, parents, carers, individuals with underlying ability and health requirements and precarious workers have been disproportionately affected (e.g., Clavijo, 2020; Craig & Churchill, 2020; OECD, 2020; O'Shea, 2020; Yarrow & Pagan, 2020).

Racial or national groups have been the recipients of increased instances of racism and harassment amid the COVID-19 pandemic (Larson, 2020). Embodied vulnerabilities have been amplified during the pandemic as neoliberal institutional practices have over-exposed different bodies while protecting others. But, we have also witnessed powerful activist responses on a global scale with hopefully world-changing dimensions, such as the recent explosions of anti-racist manifestations (e.g., Black Lives Matter) which calls for an end to

systemic, institutional racism including Black deaths in custody and police violence. It seems we are traversing an important pivotal moment in history, whereby intersectionally diverse bodies urgently reclaim their right to publicly voice instances of social discrimination and injustice that contribute to emaciating the pillars of solidarity which are vital for sustaining a ‘sane’ social world (Bauman, 2016; Johnson & Lubin, 2017; Çetinkaya, 2020; Szetela, 2020).

In writing this piece together, we foreground issues of intersectional difference, including racial and gendered inequalities in a crisis-stricken neoliberal academia and society (Holvino, 2010). We cannot stay still, for beyond our work in academia, some of us are mothers who have to nurture and care for others recognising that the life that we brought our children into has changed. Some of us are immigrants in foreign countries, with accents, passports, eating habits, customs and traditions that often need to be explained, justified, validated, reduced and normalised to fit the ideal of Western ontology and epistemology. We also hold our diverse sexual identities in relation to romantic partners or as single women. Often, we find our bodies out of place as we negotiate our place within academic ‘whiteness’ that promotes discrimination (Dar, Liu, Dy, & Brewis, 2020). The knowledge that emerges from our ‘non-white’ bodies is an inherent part of us, yet it is so often “(en)forced apart [from our embodied truth and experiences] in white patriarchal capitalist academia” to qualify as legitimate under the whiteness standard of normality (ibid, p. 6). Carrying in our living bodies so many different roles that need to be socially navigated and made sense of, we often find ourselves strained, confused and conflicted (Plotnikof et al., 2020). And, some of our intersectional differences remain unspoken for a plethora of reasons including that our preferences to disclose and discuss some intersectional differences to position oneself in academe, means that others remain silent, invisible and maybe even a source of shame.

As a group of writers, we met in Helsinki in June 2019 during a workshop on writing differently organised by *Gender, Work and Organization*, where we were able to develop multi-vocal writing on what it means to write resistance collectively as academics at different stages of our academic careers (Ahonen et al., 2020). This collective writing process enabled us to release - and possibly free - our embodied voices (22 voices at the time), to let them sit alongside each other to surface wide-ranging ideas and experiences including vulnerability, difference and discrimination that more often than not remain taboo and under-represented in neoliberal academia (Pullen, 2018; Lund & Tienari, 2019; Ahonen et al., 2020).

One year later, many things have changed. Changes that might seem to be irrelevant or independent from each other are deeply interconnected. Along with rapid changes in the social world, our daily lives, routines, rhythms and livelihoods including academic and professional plans have been interrupted overnight. Writing has been a way to connect, to talk, to share and a way of releasing embodied affects. Whilst it was impossible for us to meet face-to-face, we were able to hold a virtual meeting and share lived experiences during this global health crisis. Life commitments and responsibilities meant that some members of the original group dropped out along the way. For those of us remaining, at times it seemed impossible to write, let alone write together in that moment. Over time, however, we recognised that our bodies longed to speak, to connect, to write (even virtually).

There, it became clear that there was a desire to write-speak-share together again, to listen, relate and resonate with each other's life events and the ways in which these intermingle with each other in a crisis-stricken society. Through this collective solidarity, the safety of sharing everyday life was created, including the ability to put into words of intersectional differences, vulnerabilities and affects. After one month, we held a second meeting and we remember with fondness that our need to write-speak-share was increasing. As our possibilities of what

to write about developed naturally, our lived experiences were changing and influenced the direction of our writing (both individually and collectively). In terms of our method, we started our discussion with:

What to write?

How to write?

Where to start?

Our aim was to share personal experiences to express how our multiple lives and identities intersect with the threads of the neoliberal society and academia as we live, experience and write the everyday starting from the principle that ‘neither gender nor racial identity groupings alone can describe common experiences, standpoints, and relationships with others’ (Minow, 1996, p. 655–656, cited in Fotaki & Harding, 2017). In accordance with the above sentiment, we develop our collective voice which considers the intersectional differences inscribed on human bodies, and the ways in which these differences come together and relate to each other, with the hope that these can be heard (hooks, 1984, Crenshaw, 1991; Özkazanç-Pan, 2020). Stories that manifest our Western and non-Western intersectional identities are present, and these stories are ways of unveiling how perceived and (dis)embodied intersectionalities in neoliberal institutions are framed by institutional norms that reproduce through and by its members. Sara Ahmed wrote that “making feminist points, anti-racist points...is about pointing out structures that many are invested in not recognising” (2017, p. 158). Thus, our feminist collective voice goes beyond ‘whiteness’ (hooks, 1984; Ahmed, 2004), discussing subtle or even more explicit experiences of racism, gendered and other types of everyday social discrimination inscribed through our bodies. In doing so, we claim our right to live our embodied realities and use them to create knowledge to undo racial and gendered inequalities in society and in academia.

One might ask: Who cares about our story? Who cares about the bodies of the academic, the writer, or the worker (Pérezts, Fay, & Picard, 2015; Pullen, 2018)? Indeed, in neoliberal academia where hegemonic masculinity and its toxic effects are normalised, we have become accustomed to forget this different gendered body, to leave it behind, and to cover it with masks (Phillips, Pullen, & Rhodes, 2014; Pullen, 2018; Mandalaki & Perézts, 2020). Moreover, we are encouraged to delimit our vulnerability, pain, joy or any collective affects that we experience in our fields and writing practices (e.g., Fotaki, Metcalfe, & Harding, 2014; Thanem & Knights, 2019) because collective efforts and resistance are more difficult to tame and manage than a solitary/solidary worker. We strive to go beyond, bringing meaningful changes in society and academia (e.g., Prasad, 2016; Mandalaki & Daou, 2020) and write to converse and relate to each other, to experience academic writing as a form of embodied connection, a form of activism and resistance that needs no more to be cleansed (Pullen & Rhodes, 2008, Ahonen et al., 2020). Our multi-vocal writing is composed of non-conventional forms of academic writing, that extend beyond our embodied autoethnographic voices seeking to intermingle with larger political problems that urgently need to be addressed (Hanisch, 1970; Thanem & Knights, 2019).

In blending *different* forms of writing in this text, we offer an alternative dialogue to discussing racism, gendered and social discrimination that we experience every time when we cross the doors of the neoliberal institutions to which we belong. Moving beyond the writing conventions that confine our women academic writers' bodies (Prasad, 2016), we write in various forms; diaries, reflective accounts, photos, autobiographical stories and poetry to write-speak-express. Transcending the burgeoning organisational discussions on intersectionality (e.g., Holvino, 2010; Fotaki & Harding; 2017; Özkazanç-Pan, 2020), our account also contributes to the steadily increasing stream of organisational literature on

writing differently (e.g., Gilmore, Harding, Helin, & Pullen, 2019; Pullen, Helin, & Harding, 2020; Mandalaki & Perézts, 2020).

Our dialogue with each other begins now.

2. The Disillusionment

My grandmother was an enthusiast in classical Greek and Latin, arts and history. Not quite typical of a woman born in a remote village in Finland's puritan flatlands as one of the Czar of Russia's Barbarian subjects. She was obsessed with knowledge and fought her way to university and to the Big City where she taught languages in a business school and worked as a journalist. She took me to Rome when I was ten years old. I remember being overwhelmed, impressed, full of admiration of everything I saw while we walked the narrow streets and roamed the museums and cathedrals – and feeling small, stupid and unsophisticated. My first exposure to *Academia* was Raphael's *The School of Athens* at display in the Vatican, the City of Gold. In the fresco from the age of Renaissance, great philosophers with different viewpoints gather and discuss with the noble goal to elevate human Wisdom and Knowledge to new levels. Perhaps you have seen it too – but for me this painting has been part of my Imaginary ever since. In my fantasy, *Academia* was something distant, noble, and sophisticated – a world few mortals ever can hope to reach, a place to look up to and admire!



Raphael: *The School of Athens*

Charles Anthon defines Academia in his 1841 'Classical Dictionary' as follows:

A public garden or grove in the suburbs of Athens, about six stadia from the city, named from Academus or Hecademus, who left it to the citizens for gymnastics. It was surrounded with a wall by Hipparchus, adorned with statues, temples, and sepulchres of illustrious men; planted with olive and plane trees, and watered by the river Cephissus...(p.14)

Few retreats could be more favourable to philosophy and the Muses...

Within this enclosure Plato possessed, as part of his humble patrimony, a small garden, in which he opened a school for the reception of all those inclined to attend his instructions. Hence arose the Academic sect, and hence the term Academy has descended, though shorn of many early honors, even to our own times.

Beautiful.

Fast forward 35 years. I am a *junior* scholar, different from the others because of my age and also because I have things that what the others would categorise or perceive as having a serious and successful career in business but I simply quit to *reach for* Academia. There are very few like me. Although I have been around a business school, a very *practical* field of study to be frank, yet hardly anyone ever considers the long work history and experience I have. On the contrary, early on I overheard a number of times how people have been referring to ‘practitioners’ as people not being equipped to do a PhD or become a researcher. My 20 years of industrial experience we research and teach about is basically an empty hole in my CV in front of hiring committees and colleagues. I stopped wondering at some point and got on with it.

So, at 45, a mother of three, I started from scratch. As a PhD student, I supervised exams and worked as a teacher’s assistant on a salary that was far below subsistence level for a household of four. With no vacations or days off, I completed my PhD in four years, and I created my own networks and published three ‘top’ articles out of my dissertation in the following two years. I did everything I had to, to ‘make it’. I did exactly as I was told, pretty much not asking questions when I should have, and then later asking them when I should *not* have. But something happened. *Academia* gradually deflated in my eyes and as years passed by, it came to resemble, rather than *The School of Athens*, a sloppily cared for factory operation with a messy process, severe quality issues, and populated by too many dubious characters that I would not recommend my daughter to frequent without a warning. But it’s my garden now, not quite like Plato’s, but *mine*. I lost my soul; I lost my way... and I lost my heart. Yet I still seem to move between enchantment and disillusion in random waves, like a

never-ending Wheel of Fortune. This is how I feel like *right now*, anyway, that I am tired, worried, and weary.

During the COVID mess when our kitchen table was turned into a home-school centre for my younger kids, platform for remote teaching, material support for serving meals and where my Mac permanently occupied a spot next to me like yet another family member, a voice within that started weak, got stronger and stronger with each day, week and month of confinement. *This relationship is not working! You cannot fix the system nor the people in it, you are draining yourself for no-thing, for an ideal, for a fresco somewhere in Italy, for the admiration you had for your grandmother, for that one scholar here and another one there, out of many, that you look up to amidst many more others you do not... and this institution of modern day Academia that is just so... immensely dysfunctional... unintelligent, unintellectual... And anyway, you are not good enough to make a difference!* An accidental look into my bathroom mirror. I do not see my uncombed hair and wrinkles under my eyes this time. I see a clumsy, idealist fool.

I do not mean to brag, but I am not a quitter – nor a spoiled person. Five countries, three continents, four different careers, *and* more of immigration/emigration and starting from scratch behind me than I ever cared for... here I am, finally, acknowledging defeat. My pre-teen romance with Academia has turned into a toxic love affair, an addiction I just know I must wiggle out of. Will I lose or will I win?

I hate regrets like any other passionate nature, but these days, too often long for my old job in IT I left to do my PhD. I was once asked to formally recommend the PhD program I just graduated from to a talented Masters student. I just could not. I kept quiet – and I know my

silence did not go unnoticed. He soon updated his LinkedIn profile to a bank officer. I felt relieved. *Come only if there is an inner voice you cannot suffocate that makes you obsessed and if you have an academic 'mum' or 'dad' to escort you through and help you land a job after. Else, do something else. And for practitioners like myself... well, there are better, less painful ways of cultivating one's intellect.*

Marlene Dietrich, one of the greatest actors of all times (as far as I'm concerned), renders a heart-wrenching version of the song *Das Lied Ist Aus* (The song is over) on the radio when I either drive my son to his football practice or bring him back from there (cannot remember), and I sing along while the little boy holds his ears. 'A song of goodbye and of tears. And of long parting. Don't ask me why I cry...' Marlene's melancholy talking voice of a mature woman lingers in the air before she starts the song. To me, Academia is a fantasy, a hoax, a scam, an illusion, a dream, a river of no return, a devious lover. With a silver lining, I may or may not believe in tomorrow morning.

3. Notes from lockdown diaries of two mothers in academia

3.1 Anger

I hear my younger son E crying pitifully. He keeps repeating: 'It was a new car; it has been given to me recently'. I am looking at the floor and I see the broken car and slowly start to realize that I have just thrown his car so hard against the floor that it cannot be repaired. *Oh, my God, what has just happened?*

It is Saturday, the 10th day of the quarantine. We do not know that there are at least two months of isolation ahead. 724 366 people have been infected so far. I check every day, a few times a day. We, my two sons and I, try to obey all the rules. We clean hands more often than usual; we do not meet with other people; we do not use public transportation; we visit only grocery shops avoiding being close to other people and touching anything we do not buy.

The university is closed, my joy, my pride. It has given me the sense of professional belonging in a foreign country. As a second-year doctoral student, I felt being one of those bright intelligent people dedicated to their work. Now it is closed, and we are disconnected. I am not a part of this anthill anymore. I cannot sit at my desk in the office and distract my roommate

from doing her work. I cannot be distracted by her. We will not go for lunch to have a break after working hard. We will at best meet in Zoom on our unit meetings. Nevertheless, there is much work to do: finalising two articles by the deadlines, preparing for Zoom meetings with co-authors and teaching online. *How this comes, I have not yet learned how to cope with anxiety related to teaching?*

I go out of my room, full of energy, I know I can do much today. I will just have to organise kids so that they do not spend the whole day on their smartphones. We have already agreed with my elder son G that he will vacuum and then they will go for a walk while I will be working. I see them sitting on the sofa. G is playing Minecraft and E is watching him playing. I remind them about cleaning, and they ask for a few more minutes. I make the face; they realise they should give the phone to me. G starts vacuuming, I am doing my part - cleaning the kitchen. E is nearby helping me. I cannot wait to go back to my room to work instead of cleaning. I feel inspired to write today. The cleaning will take half an hour maximum.

G seems to be slow. I ask him to hurry up. He tells me that he will clean with his own speed. He is 14. He looks at himself in the mirror, he dances, he sings. It annoys me. He sees me becoming annoyed and he shows me with all his body, performing slow motion, that he doesn't care. He puts his headphones on, trying to stay in his perfect mood, teasing me. It is me, who is in a hurry, not him. I go to the kitchen and continue cleaning. From there I hear that the vacuum cleaner is not working. Two minutes, five minutes. I go back and nervously start vacuuming myself. G comes out of his room looking angry. He yells that I should do my work and he will do his. I am going back to the kitchen and I try to calm down, but I can't. I go again to the corridor, take a toy, which lays on my way, from the floor. I am telling something to G, trying to suppress him emotionally with my voice, with my body. I don't want to lose this battle. I don't want to feel crushed by my son. I want to feel like a leader here. No matter what his dad tells him about being the oldest man in the family while the dad is away. My beloved husband is three thousand kilometres away from here earning money for our better future. The border is closed. *Hier bin Ich der Boss. Я здесь главная. I am the boss here.*

G behaves the same way I do. He is raising his creaking, breaking teenager's voice. It has both notes of a child and notes of a grown-up man. I hear him ordering me to go to clean something else, because there is much mess in this house. I get crazy and throw something against the floor with all my fucking anger yelling and shouting something like: *'Do you think I don't know what a mess we have here?'*

Suddenly, I hear my younger son E crying pitifully. He keeps saying: *'It was a new car; it has been given to me recently'*. I am looking at the floor and I see the broken car. I slowly start to realise that I have just thrown his toy car so hard against the floor that it cannot be repaired.

Yeah, I was about to have a productive writing day today.

Oh, for God's sake, you are a mother first of all. That is where you ought to belong.

3.2 Breathing

It is the second week of my vacation; we are in a car driving towards the city from the countryside. Deep breaths, that's been my mantra for the past months. Just take a deep breath and let the air sink to your lungs, calm your thoughts and the arrhythmia will pass. It does not. The scenery changes and the tears flow. The things left undone constantly remind me where to start when returning to work. Am I entitled to this vacation? I should be doing research, writing my thesis, planning the teaching, I'm lagging behind. But the COVID-19 has touched many others much more roughly than myself, I'm privileged and there's no escape from that. This is a personal problem – deal with it – a voice inside me demands, just decide *you are enough*.

On a Wednesday afternoon in April, in the midst of the first corona wave, I stand at the front door of our home. We have been following the government guidelines quite strictly for a month now; both I and my husband are working from home, kids are taken off the daycare, we have avoided all social contacts and soaked ourselves in soap and disinfectant after the once a week visit to the supermarket. A deep breath. I have just taken time for myself, broken the rules and had a 2 hour walk with my colleagues to help us deal with all this and I am returning home. Order of the tasks-to-do shuffles in my head. A quick shower, cook dinner, clean up the kitchen, bath the kids, check the emails, call to check up on my grandmother, fix a quick snack for the kids before bed, bed-time stories, cuddles and at least an hour to get them to sleep, comment the first batch of received drafts of bachelor's thesis, organize the online space for thesis presentations. It is midnight. Where's the link to the recorded webinar 'Introduction to Zoom'? I am regretting the two hours spent outdoors during the day.

The next morning it starts again. Which one of us takes care of the kids at which time? A 2-year-old and a 5-year-old still need almost constant attention and care. Someone being there for them, being emotionally available to get them through the day. But I have not been there, not with my whole body and heart. The shuffle is constant – what needs to be done next so that everything gets done. Couldn't I 'loosen up a bit' as my husband suggests. Everything cannot get done during a pandemic. It is my turn to work, I have three hours for my thesis, but concentration is difficult. Someone is in the room all the time. After a while I snap at my kids. Especially for a 2-year-old who I should know to not be able to understand a mom present at home, but not available for her needs. And I regret it again. I stop my work and go and comfort the crying child. She quickly climbs to my lap and places her small arms tightly around my neck, just to make sure I'm hers. I play with her on the floor for half an hour and then return to my workstation just to hear my husband's work phone ringing. My three-hour slot is gone.

My thoughts are not with my kids, nor are they at work. They shuffle in-between. Never landing to either or. I feel I'm neglecting my responsibilities. I'm inadequate as a mother and a scholar. Email from the university administration catches my eye. Looking for the silver lining of the difficult situation, it urges us to embrace this opportunity to focus on research. It feels like a joke. Then a slap on my face. I feel urged to answer and explain my situation which is not unique, but I do not. I know my place. Instead, I open my laptop and find comfort in writing, reaching out for others, writing differently (e.g. Gilmore et al., 2019; Pullen, Helin, & Harding,

2020) and in relation (Phillips, Pullen, & Rhodes, 2014). Inspired or triggered by the email, I cannot help wondering if the pandemic has just intensified my own insecurities by bringing mothering and work even more concretely and intensively under the same roof. I have two roles, two ideals to strive for, yet each one pulling me further from the other. ‘Don’t be so harsh on yourself’ people say, ‘it is you who builds the expectations’. So, one day I just woke up and thought that this is how a good mother behaves and this is how a good scholar performs? I own the expectations I cannot fill myself, but I struggle to see them not set by a society and its organizing principles based on the norm of a working man free of the burden of domestic labour. Invisible labour. But why after decades of writings of it, it is still invisible or dismissed as a labour at all?

A retrospect to the pre-pandemic world, October 2019. The weight is in my chest, I’m entering the faculty after a bad night’s sleep. My youngest one has a fever and she was up most of the night. A deep breath. I walk through the corridors and my eye catches the portraits on the walls. All males, in impressive frames. They look well composed and have determination in their eyes. I keep wondering what kind of people they were behind the portraits. They look assertive. A slash of jealousy runs through me. I drop my coat to my office and head to a lecture hall with 200 students waiting for me. What could they learn through me? I’m nervous in front of a crowd, in front of the gaze. Now would be the time to dig out the masculine traits, to perform. And I do, but I would love to discuss with them one-on-one, or in small groups, I would like to learn to know them and their stories. Why are they here? What do they wish to learn? I need to know them to care. Can that be my choice in academia, to care? A mother in me seeks room, but in the midst of my performance, a voice in my head tells me, don’t seem too needy for their attention and approval, don’t be too loud, too emotional or too sensitive, don’t let them see your discomfort. This is not about you. Be professional. Yet there will be the one in the audience, who will make it about you, who will give you ‘the look’, oh and the group of 18-year-olds gossiping about the outfit of the day. A deep breath. In the materiality of intense masculinity, the mother in me shrinks.

Guy and Arthur (2020) recently expressed that juggling the dual-role of a mother and an academic has taken a whole new meaning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ‘who am I?’ question, triggered by specific uncertain circumstances (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008) of pandemic, has caused us anxiety and become even more difficult to answer than before. We find it hard to separate those roles, and we find it even harder to separate our desires from socially imposed duties (see also Plotnikof et al., 2020). Although in the texts above we write as junior academics and mothers, we do not write of motherhood as a separation from all other women, non-mothers. Rather, we wish to note that during this

extraordinary time, associations and experiences of mothering should not be solely attached to the productivity of a woman's womb (Clancy, 2020), but seen as touching upon many women, regardless of their status as mothers or not.

After writing the two very intuitive reflections of our experiences of the past spring and time leading to it, we noticed many resonances in our texts that we have now shared with you. Connections rising from motherhood as an “intriguing scholarly topic with links to embodiment, the performance of gender, materiality, affectivity, femininity and sexuality, as well as power, structural issues and patriarchal oppression” (Huopainen & Satama, 2019, p. 102). Together, we came to think how those stories that we are so used to telling ourselves might come to restrain our potential to become – to become researchers, mothers, women in academia; and how by bringing up these connections, we need to change those stories so that the (m)other, the feminine in us (Höpfl, 2000), does not have to shrink, does not have to estrange us from the academia, where we seek to belong too.

4. Rupturing in/of the everyday

A colleague recently gave me the language to describe how I am feeling; I have survived. Coming out of lockdown I have been overwhelmed, disorientated, and lost. Struggling to make sense of this abject state, I attempted to carry on with the normal routine, achieving little on my daily lists. Days pass, weeks pass, and I wonder why I fail to put into words my discomfort with being in my skin, a new skin perhaps. A disillusionment: a deep questioning of the ways in which anxiety is permeating society. Of course, lockdown and living during the COVID-19 pandemic has intersected with global challenges which have questioned our being. As a mother, prioritising the safety and wellbeing of my child has been a welcome

distraction from the privileged nothingness I experienced. Returning to school brought forth mental and physical disruption. Returning to work brought forth fear. How can universities, known for their slow decision-making process, effect change so quickly? Desperate economic times led to swift decision-making, all university activities were moved on-line within days. Not once during the lockdown and working from home with teaching at home whilst schooling at home, did the same university acknowledge the private – the care work, home constraints, and well-being of its employees. In the same way, the university opened within days – and again the labours beyond those supporting students were invisible. I am starting to wonder whether my experiences of lockdown, the fatigue in everyday life and the excessive workload ever existed. Business as normal. Now we are managing economic shortfall – take leave and do research on leave, voluntary severances are available and if the eligible don't accept this route out we will follow other universities with forced severances. It is expected that tens of thousands of academics will lose their jobs in addressing university shortfalls. Yet, in these past days I have walked around three university campuses and the building work continues, grounds are maintained. But, universities have changed. COVID-19 has reified the problem of universities who rely on overseas students to flourish. The precarity for university staff is tangible, and I am one of the privileged. COVID-19 – the time universities restructured for efficiencies, that defines what universities become in the future, or even if universities survive in their current form. What a lasting recognition of the scholarship and people who make up universities. Neoliberalism has taken hold of universities and there is no turning back unless there is radical action.

Below I share five texts written at different points in time, during and after lockdown. Re-reading them again makes me tremble. I am so cold, from my hairline down the middle of my stiff neck, down my tired spine and through to the tips of my fingers as I type these words. I gasp and type faster in case these words may never depart my body. I am wondering how my

colleagues feel when they express themselves, and especially when they don't know what to say. These seem to be about everyday moments that reveal a profound sense of clarity around issues that affected me without knowing. They are vulnerable moments when the monotony of the everyday are disrupted – these ruptures focus on everyday objects, which are associated with affective states. They enable me to remember; remember by body pressing on them, being pressed by them. In this way, I recognise them as being able to give voice to the impact of the crisis, even when words fail me during survival mode.

4.1 The weeping fig tree

Lockdown, the relief of not having to navigate city life, bodies, masks, sanitising stations, and temperature checks;
the intensity of the pandemic, and its rhythms, felt in my body gradually lessened.
Privileged and able to live with more than basic needs.
Over time, new intensities rose in my chest as the reality of a slower, more basic life diminished;
working from home, a neoliberal middle-class gift for the professional class, yet working at home for neoliberal academe infuses every porous wall, suffocating every corner of my family home.
24/7 labour – working after caring, working after neglecting caring.
Struggling, juggling, day after day, the fatigue sets in and, then I recall those without a home, and those whose home threatens their existence.
I am reminded of those living in the favelas and how crisis management is essential to slow the spread;
I remember those Indigenous communities at risk of eco/genocide from government neglect.
Global inequalities are now perpetuated by COVID-19.

4.2 The shower

The water is set to an unbearable temperature, water running down my back I feel some relief from the numbness,
as time passed, the temperature increased, and slowly, I came to feel nothing;
forehead on the cold tiles of the shower wall, hot water burning my back, sensation returns.
I have no idea why I feel nothing.
I slept 3 hours last night. I finished my lecture at 10 pm and started to prepare for the next day's session;
the university fails to acknowledge human experience – the difference in experience.
No recognition of women, parents, carers.
No care. How is this possible?
I am fortunate, I tell myself, the comparisons with others made inside my head give evidence to this.
But my reality is one of complete denigration.

Institutional responsibilities pushed down to individuals.

4.3 The rug

Sitting. Time passes.

Fingers tingling. I'm unable to type another email.

It is 9.25 pm and I've just finished my class, the last class of this unit for this cohort.

I close the lid of the computer and stare.

How long have I been feeling like this?

Usually I start my preparation for my class in the morning but tonight I can't move.

I stare at the flowers on the rug beneath my feet. This rug is art, not only aesthetically pleasing but also it carries many memories of places and spaces, and the people that have crossed over it.

I stare and my memories are vacant. Did anything happen on this mat? I stare more. Where am I? What do I do now?

My legs tremor with anticipation of moving, and I slowly stand up. Feeling strange. I crash back into the desk-chair and look at my hands. They have worked for the best part of every day for 13 weeks. How did the workload pass? How did everything else get done?

Depleted, fractured and fragile, I hunch over the desk and summon enough energy to climb into bed.

I ask myself who have I neglected these days. It is I, my heart replied.

4.4 Absent object

In between, I am neither here nor, there.

The spatial and temporal disruptions present confusions.

Guilt, indulgence, shame –

I am not a full enough mother as my energies are elsewhere;

I am not a full enough academic soldier as I am affected by what is happening;

I am not a full enough teacher because I am unable to split myself away from my home life;

I am not a full enough partner because there is no time, all this striving in my voice looking for perfection.

This pandemic is about life and death for many, and for me, it has been about learning to fail, to resist neoliberal attempts that diminish my experience as irrelevant, deficit, and devalued.

When my voice is not a normalised voice, any voice is a gift today.

For whilst I am trapped inside my own head, imagining a future that is more humane and sustainable gives me hope.

4.5 The blue plastic chair

The fatigue of living with COVID lives on; we are now in a "second wave". The fear of impending lockdown looms, but we haven't fully resumed to the "new normal" in my part of the world. I am at the emergency department of the hospital. My son has been sick for days, I wonder whether it is COVID related. Today he is very ill, and the local doctor advised to bring him here masked. He needs to be tested for COVID following the unwavering procedures set by the hospital team. The vibrant blue plastic covering the chair reminds me of where we are in definite terms.

In the next bed, a 16-year-old arrives after attempting to jump off a bridge.

The doctor asks: Is everything alright with school? Then: is everything alright at home? They are looking for reasons to explain the anxiety. The pandemic was never mentioned. The despair in the mother's voice ran through every part of my body. I wanted to scream, if you are not feeling anxious you are dead. But explanations are needed.

After hours my son is admitted, a team of five in protective clothing house him in a sealed room.

One of the five carries a bucket and a white cloth. Every time someone touches a door, elevator button, wheelchair, the white cloth is vigorously dunked and swished around the bucket before disinfecting. It is clear that 'living with COVID' is containment and risk management. The ability to provide care is impressive, overcoming fear and barriers to be able to provide care. We sat for hours, that turned into a day and night, before the result came that the COVID test was negative. My son could now have more extensive tests in different parts of the hospital. A two-week-old baby is tested, screaming solidly for over an hour.

The days and nights passed, and we were discharged, free to go home. As we leave, a new-born arrives with suspected COVID. That look of fear was shared – mother, father, doctors, nurses, my son and I. The silence rings loudly in the air.

Never has home felt better. Still thinking of the new-born. Do all these private battles go unrecognised?

5. Inter-sections

Outside of my window

The world

A world

is on fire

Crisis

Crises

Everywhere

Sanitary

Economic

Social

Gendered

Racial

So much more

I somehow know how this feels

Some of it

Maybe parts of it

Together

I am a woman

I am an early career academic

And an immigrant

In a foreign country

Coming from a country

Badly hit by a long

Economic

Social

Political

HUMAN

Crisis

And I carry

This stigma

I know it

I feel it

People say

“Oh things must be hard at your place”

“Is this why you left?”

“How are your parents doing?”

“What is the basic salary now in Greece?”

“Is it true that Greeks are lazy and don’t pay their taxes?”

(no it is not true, I want to shout)

Are they interested or arrogant?

I don’t know

I might never know

What should I reply?

My body intersects

with all these markers of difference

That create my identity

In other’s eyes

And I am automatically put in a category

More specifically

I am a Greek

In France

A ‘mademoiselle’

My Greek ‘cute’ accent

as locals say

will always be understood

when I speak in English

or in French

When I go to buy some bread

from the ‘boulangerie’

of the neighbourhood

as well as when I enter

public agencies

or the university gates

my name

will never be said correctly

there will always be

a ‘better’, shorter version for it

easier to spell in public documents

or to articulate for the locals

it doesn’t matter how many times I repeat it

Am I a ‘cute’ mademoiselle

In a masculine society?

this accent

this name

that I can do nothing about

I strive to emulate their accent

But I cannot

The roughness of my Greek palate

will always betray me

should I deny who I am?

Who am I?

This, which/who I am
might also be the reason
for which it might be harder
than usual
to find an apartment in Paris

People say

This accent again

This passport again

Never enough

Always an obstacle

A threat to normality

People say I should finally get the French passport

And *Frenchize* my name

This will save me a lot of trouble

In daily life

Does this mean

That who I am is not enough?

Who am I?

Same feeling in academia

My English not good enough

I repeat myself a lot

I should try to use different words

More appropriate

Or use words differently

Am I not enough?

Is what I have to offer not enough?

my skin colour is ‘white’

yet I remain a minority that

will never reach the ‘whiteness’ academic standard

I feel it, I perceive it

Then my colleague said:

“You are experienced, dear”

“You will tell us how to go about it”

I am now confused

I am junior and ‘senior’

at the same time

I am a non-native English and French speaker

And writer

but I should write like a native

I have an accent

but I should hide it when I speak

then summer break is around the corner

and I thought I would go ‘home’

BUT

entering Greece from France now

is an actual reason for discrimination

You are a potential carrier of the virus

Am I also a stranger at 'home'?

discriminated even where it all started

unable to touch my sisters, my mother, my father

the skin of those that taught me the world

my senses deleted when I live

as when I write

I feel 'homeless' but 'homesick'

in life and in academia

what a paradox!

What the hell am I?

I am confused

Power flows

That harm

Others that heal the pain

Subtle experiences

Where my gender

Age

Race

Social class

Nationality

Intersect

I cannot escape

Time and again

Endless wordings

That we strive to put in academic wordings

6. It's not just Black and White: Confusion, Vulnerability and In-betweenness

What are the implications of the unprecedented global health crisis on our lives and livelihoods and broadly, our society? And apparently, this question has become the new mantra manifested in numerous political, economic, media and scholarly debates in the past few months. As a junior female Chinese academic coping in the UK, I try hard to search for the right “tone” of my colour in a changing world – where do I stand between Black and White.

I sit at the dining table pondering how I should construct my mixed feelings and emotions – increased anger, fear, anxiety, frustration, and loneliness, at times fuelled with blank thoughts in silent moments, and embodied struggles generated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many voices are emerging. Since the novel coronavirus outbreak, I have witnessed how the coronavirus fears expose a ‘shocking’ level of race-based violence, online and offline, and xenophobia against Chinese and Asian people, women in particular, and those who may look like Chinese, simply because of our skin tone. It is reported that a Chinese cyclist was in an attack cycling in Nottinghamshire, when a car dropped by next to her, throwing beer at the woman and laughed inside (BBC, 2020a). As one of the ‘subjects’ to this viral anti-Asian racism containing and consuming frustration, distrust and anger on my own, I decided to capture the ample manifestations of mask phobia, prejudice, and racial discrimination against people of Chinese origins connected to coronavirus outbreak in the UK. I hope to foster

alternative conversations as to how we might engender new approaches to combat racism for an equitable society.

Under the three-months national lockdown, I have spent an increased time on following broadcasting news and social media updates, but I was shocked by the idiocy of anti-China sentiment. Racist memes and videos such as ‘Chinese eat bats and dogs’ are circulating, that purported bats and dogs as Chinese dishes, accusing and blaming us for originating and carrying the deadly virus. My social networks account has also received disgusting comments asking if I do eat these things. I soon realised that the media and social networks have become the greatest ‘pool’ for expressing toxic posts and comments, and the public promotion of ‘China virus’ and ‘Kung flu’ by President Trump (Guardian, 2020a) and other politicians aggravated anti-Chinese rhetoric. As a woman of Chinese origin, I find myself extremely vulnerable in this timing – potentially be the next ‘target’ for brutal racist harassment. Following the shocking news of the police killing of George Floyd, I, along with the public, have seen widespread protests movements e.g., Black Lives Matter, against race-based violence and inequalities across the world. Afua Hirsch reminded us that the racist heritage that is fuelling the protests is deeply connected to negative aspects of British history (Guardian, 2020b). Racial inequalities are neither necessarily overt nor isolated incidents. Racism is an everyday facet of UK society and racial inequalities manifest themselves in everyday lives and livelihoods, e.g., in different situations, processes and behaviours. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, it was also evidenced that deaths among Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities in the UK were disproportionately high (BBC, 2020b). Potential reasons include their lower level access to socio-economic capital and medical/healthcare resources, manifested in the disproportionate BAME employment in precarious positions in the UK society, e.g., lower wage band key worker roles who either

work in high exposure care environments or are unable to implement safe social distancing rules because of their roles. In short, no wealth, no health.

I can't walk around without unwanted attention because I wear a mask. It seems that when people see Asians wearing face masks they automatically suspect we are ill or carrying the deadly virus, despite in other countries where the local authorities have advised their citizens to wear face masks to protect the spreading of the virus. And it was common back then to wear a mask in other European countries such as Italy. Yet I was once shouted at 'virus' on the underground commuting in London for wearing a face mask just a few days before national lockdown. After then I stopped wearing a mask because I was afraid of being physically assaulted over mask phobia, until the government's recent announcement (on 4th June 2020) that it is compulsory to wear face coverings on public transports, shops and supermarkets. I feel safer to wear a mask since then.

Looking back, several interlocked systems of oppression could be acknowledged that have been constantly shaping my life and livelihood, as a single woman of colour and a migrant – some neglected attributes and vulnerabilities that affect my living experiences and choices have simply been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. The literature on intersectionality has pointed out that identities of women of colour are heterogeneous and distinct, which subject to their positions within the interlocking systems of oppression and how do they intersect and act upon to articulate and resist the categorised dominant whiteness (Carastathis, 2016). It explains why experiences of women of colour are shaped and reshaped by these systems of oppression, reflecting upon the individual's position as an agency in the matrix of domination and intersectionality. This further indicates that women's 'identity locations' within these systems of oppression are not fixed and static, nor mutually exclusive, rather than representing where they are - as actors at their intersection of which women's

experiences and choices are distinctively negotiated (Chiara, 2020). Yet the prevalence of Chinese students studying across British institutions contribute further to the discourse of race-based inequalities and racism omit Chinese ethnic groups in the UK. The visibility of Chinatowns and flourishing commodified artefacts of ethnic catering services ‘mask’ the discourse of multiculturalism in the UK, where a society is profoundly constructed by white supremacist ideologies (Burnett, 2017). As members of racial and ethnic minority groups, we are often perceived as ‘different’, ‘aliens’ and ‘foreign invaders’ for the hegemonic perpetuation of dominant ethnic (white) groups (Liu, 2017b). As *others*, we do not belong to the mainstream narratives depicted by the dominant societal groups and are not likely to align with white culture. Despite myself being assimilated to the British society, I am still an ‘outsider’ and being excluded.

As the one responsible for our Chinese students at work, I tried to hide my own insecurity. I have taken on the role as the check-in point – keeping close contact with international students and checking if they are fine, whether they are able to return to the UK, and how those staying in the UK respond to the discrimination in the society etc; since then my email box has been spammed with loads of anxious inquiries over mask phobia, fear of getting caught of this deadly virus, and complains about the sudden shift of all teaching activities moving online. Students were hanging on to me. They wanted me to tell them that things would be alright, and indeed I did so.

Teacher, what should I do? I don't dare wear a mask. I heard Chinese students are getting beaten up in the street if we wear it. But I really feel we should wear it. The virus is too dangerous.

Mrs, my parents are worried about me. They don't let me out. Can I stay in China for another two weeks?

Poor students – the first time abroad experiencing such an unprecedented crisis with a huge value clash to deal with, and some of them were still stranded in China for the term break. Contradicting information and asynchronous announcements by different government authorities spread across the mainstream media outlets, manifested in the debates such as whether wearing face masks are useful to protect people from infection. In February, my students received an email from senior leadership telling them that wearing a mask is not helpful. As of 9th April 2020, Public Health England (PHE) is not advising members of public that are not ill to wear face masks, or if you are in a clinical setting, yet on 6th April 2020, World Health Organisations (WHO) announced that wearing a medical mask in a community setting is one of the prevention measures that can limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that these kids got confused and concerned, in line with the consequent discrimination behaviours originated by the pandemic, and so do I.

Looking back, that was the strange, uncertain and anxious February and early March. Until lockdown hits Britain. All my students were panicking.

What? No more physical classes? Can we still graduate?

How can I defer my studies? It's difficult to focus and study without human interaction.

Then followed by anger –

This is reduced teaching. Not worthy of the money we've paid. I didn't pay £14,000 to teach myself my Masters!

Our programme is a UK based taught course, not self-learning!

“Not to worry. You will be alright. You are doing great. It will just be a different type of learning experience...” One by one, I assured my panicking students.

Indeed, there was a lot of free labour – emotional and physical, but I was glad that I did what was needed for the students. Students wanted to be cared for by their teachers at an uncertain time. Caring is a major aspect of teaching, and the association between caring and good teaching has been established in literature (Lipsitz, 1995; Noddings, 1996; Goldstein, 1999). However, the emotional labour in caring teaching has rarely been acknowledged in constituting the role of teachers (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). I am an early-career academic, but like many other female early career academics, I am also the programme(s) director owing thanks to the grandiosity in contemporary management and education (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2016). Such fancy administrative titles with either “Director” or “Deputy Director” involved tend to favour junior female academics (Thanacoody, Bartram & Jacobs, 2006). In my case, it seems that I am simply the ‘perfect’ or best fit as the majority of postgraduates enrolled are international students from China. I have been brought up in a country that has a centuries-tradition thinking mode rooted in Confucianism and Daoism (Liu, 2017a), and thereby “yes, of course” seems to be my instant response despite the influence of the Western education that I’ve received later on. Yet I woke up with chills when I was told by a fellow white male colleague assertively that it was without doubt my job to deal with all student complaints, and that it was disrespectful that I questioned his judgement. Admittedly COVID-19 stress had a lot to do with the strong reaction. However, I could not pretend any longer that ‘yellow’ is a neutral ethnicity. I never viewed my white colleagues through the ethnicity lens and thought they would also see me primarily as a fellow researcher and teacher. Now I am not sure anymore.

Perhaps I should team up with the rest BAME colleagues and start fighting to get my voice heard. But then I was told “*You are not really BAME. The descriptions don’t really fit with East Asians. Chinese actually earn more than British on average.*” That might be true outside academia - Chinese workers in the UK earn around thirty percent higher than their white British counterparts according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), but is it true at universities? I am following all the debates on BAME staff, but I often wondered who or what I am especially when BAME is spelt as BME, indicating Asians are not being perceived as members of non-white communities in the UK. Race inequalities have been flagged as a significant issue of concern in the British higher education sector, where institutions are structured and restructured by forms of whiteness in comparison to blackness (Doharty, Madriaga, & Joseph-Salisbury, 2020). At times, I feel like I am always stuck in the liminal space of White and Black, West and East - like moving in a ‘swing’. Historically, Asian migrants have been depicted as the ‘model minority’, a group who are supposed to be compliant and quiet with white regimes, and this stereotype is also observed in the UK (Yeh, 2014). I believe this stereotype does explain, to some extent, my silence and hesitation of voicing up when it comes to sensitive subjects - race and racism, which might be uncomfortable to the dominant ethnic (white) group. Another reason is possibly because of my precarious positioning, as an ethnic minority, as a single woman, and as a junior academic in the workplace. I have been following a politically cautious line – avoid speaking or discussing about discrimination or the division between Chinese and non-Chinese students within the class, or within the university.

Until COVID-19, the number of Chinese students had continued to rise in the UK making them the largest group of international students (Turner, 2006; Altbach, 2019; Adams, 2020). But now the higher education sector in the UK is facing unprecedented challenges after COVID-19 with a major one being that Chinese students may not return (Mueller, 2020).

Fear over the high death toll has put off Chinese students from UK and racial discrimination towards Chinese students during COVID-19 has been quoted as one of the immediate reasons (Times Higher Education, 2020). At the moment, there is a pressing need to understand this unique group of students - the important source of the university income and it is evidenced the whole higher education sector is facing unprecedented financial hardship during this time of crisis. Debates on higher education staff learning to know the burgeoning students from China and cultural differences are repeatedly flagged by academics in the past. For example, Edwards and Ran (2006) suggested that British academics have limited understanding of the cultural expectations of Chinese students, and that there is a need to improve cultural awareness of the British teaching staff. Other education scholars further emphasised that teachers need to have a better understanding of the complexities of Chinese culture and attitudes, and that the onus should be on the teachers to adapt, and not the students (Holmes, 2004; Burrows, 2016). Yet no concrete progress on improving cultural knowledge and sensitivity of academics in the UK has been made. Chinese students are treated as the ‘elephant’ in the room. We, their teachers who are supposed to understand them and help them grow, avoid talking about them as much as we can. I reached out to my fellow Chinese colleagues for the first time I ever initiated such contact in my nine years working life in academia, hoping they might have more insights, yet I observed something I never paid much attention to – there are rarely any Chinese staff in senior leadership teams. There are of course Chinese professors especially in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields, but they are generally not involved in decision making processes at universities. Most of them prefer to stay away as far as they can from politics, even in university. And they are mostly male. But how could it be? This cannot be right.

There I was – confused, disappointed, and angered - just like my students. True it was satisfying to work with and for my students, but I saw things that I didn’t think were right,

and it was beyond my junior rank to raise it not to mention fixing it. Why aren't the expertise of Chinese staff reflected in the university staff structure? I couldn't help wondering if this situation would be probably different if there were representations of Chinese views in the senior leadership level across the institution. And perhaps this way will actually bring some radical changes and those young and vulnerable overseas Chinese, would have felt less hurt. Otherwise, there will be no use if all Chinese staff with most experience and expertise of working with Chinese students remain at the teaching fellow or lecturer level. And the insights on how to manage the large population of Chinese students – around 120,000 (BBC, 2020c) will never get fed into the senior leadership team, and thus will not have any chance to be taken into new policy making.

As a promising uprising, yet extremely vulnerable junior female academic in the UK business school of white supremacy, I do not want to be perceived as a 'troublemaker' and am still eager to benefit from being included and recognised in a group of dominance. Here, I find ourselves resonating with Simone de Beauvoir's feelings of 'irritation' and 'hesitation' before writing *The Second Sex*, in which she described her long-time hesitation of writing a book on women – a subject that is irritating especially to women and is not new. The stereotypes of women of Asian origins depicted by the dominant society group 'legitimise' us as controllable and deferential, and we are expected to be 'OK with anything', be quiet and not speak up for ourselves (Gao & Sai, 2020b). Ironically, I am a "Western"-made scholar. Critical thinking, which has been deemed the most important element in Western education, is just as deeply ingrained in my embodied thoughts as the obedience that Confucianism preaches. I cannot stop self-questioning about that are Western universities ready to accept me and scholars alike as "in-betweeners" who are in a sense of their own creation? Yet I do not have an answer.

7. Sanctuary?

Right now, I am staying in a place that has not changed in my lifetime—the cottage by a river which was left to my mother by her parents, my grandparents, and built by my great-grandfather. In the beginning of the last century, my great-grandparents came south from their home in a northern mining town every summer with their children. They travelled by train and then used horses for the rest of the journey, a day trip on a dirt road, to camp by the Madawaska river. My great-grandmother was from the area and they made the trip so she could spend time with her family. After my son was born, we lived here for most of the first year of his life. Tall pines surround and shelter the cottage, many are over two hundred years old. Last week my mother and I worked together with my husband scraping the old peeling paint off of the wood siding on the cottage exterior before repainting.

Even here everything feels strange. In mid-March Canada went into a state of lockdown. Before this happened, I observed students in one of my design classes at the college enjoying working together in groups to begin a project; I was feeling pleased with myself because I had put some thought into organising the groups, but after that day I didn't see any of them again in person. As I grappled with moving course content online students faced intensified inequalities which had previously been mitigated by in-person instruction and access to equipment in labs. As I worked to support my students, I felt the ongoing pressure I put on myself to keep on with the goals I was pursuing pre-COVID, but the days are slipping by. After finishing a PhD isn't it expected that you have to achieve according to set time frames—write your book proposal, and balance meaningful research while surviving in academia? I'm

faltering, losing sight of what used to matter. Next fall all classes will be held online. I'm not sure about the winter yet. The school administration is waiting to make a decision.

Online I saw a photograph of a woman hugging her elderly mother, between them there was a transparent plastic shower curtain hung on a clothesline for protection. I worry about my son, now 21, who works as a cashier at a grocery store while in university online taking summer courses. He lives in shared student cooperative housing in downtown Toronto. After the government advised people to lockdown, a girl he lives with was very sick and he and the others had to stay isolated in their small rooms for two weeks. That was a hard time, but he is fine, and she recovered. I can see him from time to time, so right now I feel lucky.

What has been happening in the United States, whose border is only an hour's drive from where we live is disturbing. Our economy is so integrated and though the border between our countries is closed there is talk of permitting more travel across it. Disney World opened yesterday as coronavirus spikes across the United States. Like others, I watched the video of the murder of George Floyd by police which has led to protests against racism around the world. He was so afraid before he died. You can see that if you watch the video. You can feel it.

Where is the feeling of hope to counter this fear? Hope is the expectation that something desired will happen. While it describes a feeling about a future event that one wishes for, it also refers to a broader mindset of good feeling about what will come. When we have the capacity to hope we can imagine and anticipate events in the future. It is in times of crisis that hope is invoked to sustain people, but it also enables people (Spivak, 2002). Spivak writes "crisis is an unanticipatable moment which makes something inherited perhaps jump into

something other, and fix onto something that is opposed” (2002, p.173). In crisis “hope is a leap.” The worldwide protest movements embody hope. These coincide with divisive politics surrounding the novel coronavirus and the development of intensified surveillance technologies to monitor and track the pandemic and human activities. There is a sense of being on a threshold.

8. Coda

Through this text our lives, which have been partially and selectively voiced, sit alongside each other; a representation of the in-betweenness experienced during the pandemic. Readers may not read our respect and care for each other across time-zones and other differences, including the intersectional differences raised by different writers, but this care sits in the pages of this text. Through writing we created an environment for compassion and empathy across difference, where some of us felt shared experiences whilst also recognising the unique ways in which these experiences manifested. Through writing, the text becomes an embodied act of solidarity for each other, and those others whom we have shared our experiences with, but who are not represented here. Collectively, these acts break silences which so often encompass shame and determines what can be said and by whom. In acknowledging the ways in which we have been affected during the pandemic, we reclaim these affects by remembering them in writing. This includes the ways in which we relate to each other. These relations enable us to share, speak and write. They are ethical relations which attempt to move away from marking others as other towards a normalisation of difference across many intersectional differences. During these pandemic days, these ethical relations – so often hidden – become political in writing and recognise the importance of the collective in not only coping with these days but also giving hope. Collectively we experience a loss of the illusion of control, where hope is necessary to live with uncertainty

and liminality. Hope provides power which women and marginalised people have historically used to survive and fight oppression and fear. bell hooks once said:

“Fear is the primary face upholding structures of domination. It promotes the desire for separation, the desire not to be known. When we are taught that safety lies away with sameness, then difference, of any kind, will appear as a threat. When we choose to love we choose to move against fear – against alienation and separation. The choice to love is a choice to connect – to find ourselves in the other” (2001, p. 93, emphasis added).

Our collective writing nurtures an ethic of love through which we can *connect and find ourselves in one another* to grow hope, faith, and trust that a better future can be possible. Writing with love is transformative, provides hope and demonstrates the possibilities of feminine writing (see for example, Vachhani, 2015). This writing stands in contrast to mainstream writing, it is writing which has possibilities for a different future – a hope that we will live better and find new ways of working against the antagonism of the current climate. Hope is neither allegorical nor a squishy concept but it is perceived to be fundamentally necessary to us as human beings during times of crises to give us a reason to move forward to reinvent our ability to love and embrace change (hooks, 2001). How epidemics intersect with long-established structural inequalities based on gender, race or capital ownership has also been depicted in popular mainstream culture, such as *Contagion* directed by Steven Soderbergh in 2011 and *The Painted Veil* directed by John Curran in 2016. In these narratives, outcomes of fear, prejudice and discordance were evidenced at certain levels during epidemics, making heightened solidarity as a renewal of love’s promise vitally important. The choices and actions we make together by connecting and writing together to counter patriarchy, racism, domination, fear, and loss will never fade away.

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