



## Feminist Praxis in Exile

### A Collaborative Autoethnography.

Gülden Özcan & Simten Coşar

#### ABSTRACT

This work is a collaborative attempt to historicize our experience as feminist academics in neoliberal settings across different countries (Turkey, Canada, the United States) in the last two decades. We narrate how we learned to act as women academics in certain male and nationalist and/or racialized settings in neoliberal moment(s). We refrain from victimhood accounts as well as the charm of heroic feminist stances. We tell our stories in terms of our relations to the socio-economic contexts that host neoliberal universities, to our presence on neoliberal campuses, to the academic circles that we happen to join, and from which we are excluded.

#### KEYWORDS

*Feminist autoethnography, neoliberalism, universities*



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## FEMINIST PRACTICE IN EXILE: A COLLABORATIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

This work is a collaborative attempt to historicize our experience as feminist academics in neoliberal settings across three different countries (i.e. Turkey, Canada, United States) in the last two decades.<sup>1</sup> We narrate how we learned to act as women academics in certain male and nationalist and/or racialized settings in neoliberal moment(s). We refrain from victimhood accounts as well as the charm of heroic feminist stances. Our situated knowledge as feminists from different generations, with different class backgrounds and ethnic identities invite us to be alert to the assumed leveling along feminism—in singular. It also orients us to opt for a collective structural account of neoliberal academics through our experiences. We tell individual stories—not individualized, isolated ones as story-telling makes it impossible. We tell our stories in terms of our relations to the socio-economic contexts that host neoliberal universities, to our presence on neoliberal campuses, to the academic circles that we happen to join, and from which we are excluded.

Ethnographic writing and feminist auto-ethnography are significant sites of knowledge production that enable the subjects to share their realities as constitutive parts of broader socio-political structures. Behar notes that “ethnographic work is inherently paradoxical, being ‘a process by which each of us confronts our respective inability to comprehend the experience of others as we recognize the absolute necessity of continuing the effort to do so.’” (Brodkey in Behar, 2003, p.271). We try to grapple with this paradox by telling our experiences together to make sense of our particular realities as well as the neoliberal world of truth claims. By locating ourselves through our experiences into a certain moment in the history of knowledge production we hope to bring in knowledge of immediacy to account for the meaning of neoliberal production systems in universities. Likewise, by bringing in our experiences in juxtaposition to each other we hope to bring in horizontal knowledge production as deviant form in neoliberal times (Coşar and Bektaş, 2017). And finally, we refrain from two autobiographies told in dialogue, and try to keep in line with feminist collaborative autoethnography that offers the space for “a keen understanding of what aspects of the self are the most important filters through which one perceives the world and, more particularly, the topic being studied.” (Behar, 1996, p.13)

Engaging in autoethnography, we take risks—a popular term in neoliberal times. We risk limiting our accounts to partiality, subjectivity, cultural boundedness, which, in effect, define our narrative (Foley, 2010: 474). We try to come to terms with this risk by situating our experiences into the neoliberal order of things as well as with our states of existence on the university campuses. Offering accounts of neoliberal academia that involve our experiences as constitutive elements brings in ordinary language “to evoke the richness and complexity of everyday life” (Foley, 2010, p.475). Besides, ours is another example of autoethnography where “the act of writing itself becomes a way of being and knowing” (Ibid.).

In our collaborative account we try to interrogate, reflect on and theorize about the unfolding of neoliberal knowledge production patterns across twenty years. We frame the narration along (1) spaces of knowledge production; (2) means of knowledge production; (3) distribution/dissemination of knowledge; and (4) contestations in everyday academic life. We believe that building our accounts and

conversation on these themes helps us problematize the class-gender-race intersections in experiencing—both as teachers and students—exploitative mechanisms in neoliberal higher education systems. We further try to observe how we have navigated the neoliberal academia without compromising collaboration, even in dire times of personal, institutional crises. Here we emphasize collaborative feminist production as interventions to male-oriented, profit-driven everyday practices in the neoliberal academia. The main argument of the paper is that feminism as praxis has always been in exile metaphorically and literally in academia, and collaborative feminist knowledge production reveals the promises of production in exile as a form of strategy for struggling against neoliberal exploitation across class-gender-race.

### Spaces of Production

As we are sitting across the screens at home, with voices coming from other rooms filled with family members...as we communicate via Zoom mostly in the past one and a half years, not only because we are in different countries and/or continents but because the COVID-19 pandemic never seems to give a break, we question whether we would have preferred this way of knowledge production and sharing even if it were not for the pandemic. For we have been trying to live not only through the pandemic but also with our “disabilities” that turned out to be ever more challenging in risky times. For example, living in pandemic conditions helped Simten to come to terms with the reality of her limitations with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). It made it easier for her to refrain from detailing her underlying medical conditions to her colleagues at work – home -work, rounds required two-hour-long bus ride in her latest visiting scholar position. It also affected her preferences when applying for jobs. In neoliberal settings this meant bending one’s expectations, hopes for future work opportunities in a totally foreign country after her unintended retirement in Turkey. At one point, Simten found herself calculating the *pros and cons* in application forms, to mark the disability option. In the neoliberal ableist work settings you take one step backwards when you do that. Your academic record, accomplishments in teaching and publishing, the promises that you make are almost automatically levelled down since chronic MS pain and fatigue does not guarantee high energetic performance and consistent flexibility, leading to cost-benefit calculations in terms of workplace arrangements and time considerations. For Gülden her breast cancer diagnosis came in the midst of the pandemic, *relieving* her from the worrisome aspects of forced in-person teaching but at the same time introducing pay-cut, and probable negative effects for her future career prospects as an early career scholar. More importantly, her diagnosis coincided with an incoming burnout—incessant teaching load through summer, fall, and winter, multi-tasked writing processes, multi-tasked grant applications, and intensive presentations at academic meetings and in social justice workspaces; excessive service work, ranging from graduate thesis supervision to jury membership and to union and professional organization work turning a work-day into a never-ending time span. Neoliberal times asks for consumption, but first self-consumption. You happen to step in works, collaboration and cooperative projects that might suit your stance against neoliberal academic requisites. But the fine line between neoliberal elasticity and volunteer work melds in the neoliberal workspace.

There are two major spaces of academic knowledge production: institutional setting (i.e. the university) and personal setting (i.e. home and neighborhoods). Since one can think, research, write and teach

<sup>1</sup> Assist Prof. Gülden Özcan, (University of Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada); Prof. Simten Coşar, Carleton University (Ontario, Canada). As this manuscript was under revision Dr. Özcan passed away. She was under breast cancer treatment since April 2021. Dr. Coşar returned to Turkey in July 2021. She was affiliated with Carleton University as an adjunct associate researcher until June 2022. Her MS progressed; she started a new medication program. For Information about

Dr. Özcan: <https://www.ulethbridge.ca/retired-faculty/obituaries/özcan-gülden> [https://www.kudoboard.com/boards/XqYFjLCC?fbclid=IwAR1puS3LvK9oMIJAltDxquXCTKPvjm\\_s6GKKTzBAPUs8X2DXJ9OhC7Ft54U](https://www.kudoboard.com/boards/XqYFjLCC?fbclid=IwAR1puS3LvK9oMIJAltDxquXCTKPvjm_s6GKKTzBAPUs8X2DXJ9OhC7Ft54U)

differently in a hut than in a palace, our class positions directly relate to the way we exist in the academic production processes. The institutional settings we came to occupy in the last two decades have been informed by neoliberal higher education policies in Turkey, Canada, and the US. And on another level, private institutions' and public institutions' adaptations to such policies were effective in the way we have positioned ourselves on the campuses, in administrative bodies, academic meetings, and the classrooms.

Our shifting class positions over the last two decades have also been effective in the way we bring knowledge production into our personal spaces and keep it at a distance. Over the last two decades, Simten moved from a fresh Ph.D. to full professor and then to retired scholar, all lived in a middle class lifestyle. Gülden moved from an undergraduate to a fresh Ph.D. from working class background to tenure-track Assistant Professor—with emerging middle class living standards. Our personal spaces shifted from shared study rooms, multi-purpose bed-and-study rooms, shared houses, desk-searching to study rooms of our own, neighborhood cafes so long as they were affordable in non-pandemic times, to office spaces and study-rooms of our own. Our personal spaces are also directly implicated by the institutional frameworks in which we have come to relate to knowledge production. Our experiences in private and public universities help us catch the significance of neoliberal elasticity in the differences and similarities among the private and public campuses and in classroom settings as spaces of knowledge production and sharing.

Classrooms can be considered as foreign landscapes for feminist racialized women academics from working class and marginalized ethnic backgrounds. University campuses are never meant to be spaces of existence for us, they are merely spaces of production. Briefly, starting from the moment we stepped into academic life in public and private universities we encountered maleness, Turkishness and whiteness, and (upper-)middle class credentials, required for relating to knowledge. This was so when we were questioned about the reasons behind our involvement in feminist theorizing. Likewise, we were called into *equal* working conditions with cis-male academics regardless of our share in domestic work, including care-work both at home and in some contexts in our relations with students as women academics. Neoliberal settings are seemingly welcoming to women academics—with their architectural claims where everyone can communicate with everyone, and with the claims to initiate innovative, flexible, student-centered knowledge relations one might get the illusion of inclusion. This is true also for the LGBTIQ+ academics in North America; and certainly not in Turkey. However, innovation, flexibility and communication are based on male norms, racial and class hierarchies. The inclusion works so long as non-male bodies are *oriented* (Ahmed, 2007, pp. 149-168) to male, ethnicized, racialized class standards – as well as the rhythms of working and walking through the campus, and budgets. This is clearly an almost impossible task if one does not have upper-middle class background, hegemonic Turkishness as one's ethnic identity in Turkey, and white upper-middle class identities in North America. Thus, you fall short of communication with your peers if your budget does not let you eat regularly in the private universities' cafeterias. This most frequently relates to non-academic criteria to integrate into the academic world—eating, drinking, speaking codes that require the habitus of the upper-middle class (Bourdieu, 2010 [1984]). You need to get the basic sense of drinking wine and eating ethnic dishes in North America, and mostly West European, aestheticized dishes in Turkey. Simten's ignorance of how to *aesthetically* eat a lobster – at an international meeting - and Gülden's ignorance of Asian food and inability to use chopsticks – at a Japanese restaurant as part of her job interview - are the simplest examples of the preset habitus baggage that silently separates the fit and the less fit ones in academic spaces.

The spatial constitution of naturalized inequalities in academic life are reproduced through generations. Neoliberal forms of this reproduction might be observed in the presumed scarcity of office spaces, in hierarchical placements among academics, and in the mainstreaming-

as-malestreaming of gender sensitive ethics in work relations. The overlap between hierarchical placement and physical placement is evident in the unequal distribution of workspaces for graduate students and faculty. An additional inequality emerges when academics step onto campuses temporarily, as *visitors-at-risk*. Simten's visiting experiences in North American universities attest to the normalization of inegalitarian spatial distribution. One might endure almost forced sharing of space, despite safety concerns while the alternative would turn out to be a narrower, windowless, less functional office. Another example is about safety concerns of a woman graduate student who tries to avoid the traumatic implications of meeting her harasser frequently. She demands the move of his office to another floor. The administrative response turns out to reproduce the men-women, graduate student-senior faculty asymmetries: her office gets moved to another building, impairing all spatial ties with her peers.

Gülden's experience as a graduate student was about "taking space" among white entitled graduate students who easily took or crowded the spaces physically and vocally. Racialized graduate students are so visible that they are pushed into invisibility by the forceful performance of entitled bodies and voices—they are forced into passive stance that makes it difficult to claim the space; and this is not because of personal attributes of kindness, shyness, but the reluctance of the privileged ones to hear them. Such asymmetries puts the racialized academics out of space. Thus, we are more than frequently non-existent in the encounters with senior, white, male-female academics in the hallways. Racialized, gendered—*worse still* feminist—academics are not heard in the meeting rooms, their sentences are traded with the more important statements of white, male academics—so we are invited to live in a vanishing state of physical and verbal presence.

Although our voices are heard, and our bodies are well-monitored in classrooms, the gendered and racialized politics of everyday academic life continues there, too. More than often, we are incited to continue with Western (Political) Theory as the Theory-as-such. Simten was questioned when she integrated feminist perspectives into her course contents in Turkey's universities. Feminist academics are constantly invited to compete with female and male peers—and in Turkey LGBTIQ+ competitors are pushed into absence—on supposedly *equal* grounds, and regardless of the inequalities they experience due to class and ethnic backgrounds – a clear difference from the liberal campuses in North America. The time spent travelling to the campus, the hurdles of poor public transportation, financial difficulties that make it impossible to own cars are treated as beside-the-point and purely personal problems. Women academics are mostly treated as (potential) mothers, with motherly tendencies. Keeping emotions at bay is a requisite as emotions are deemed contrary to the rational world of social science, but at the same time we are expected to act motherly, caring in our classrooms. Yet, we have to struggle to fulfill our actually existing mothering roles in the rather inconvenient campus settings for breast-feeding, diaper-changing, kindergarten, as well as compensations for childcare and elder-care expenses, let alone our special needs-based expenses. These aside, in North America with ESL and in Turkey in the top ranking private universities we have to polish our accents in English in order to appeal to the urban, (upper-)middle class student groups. In North America we are expected to tailor down our knowledge-based expectations from the students who are treated as customers and/or products-as-graduates in neoliberal higher education markets.

We work on campuses, wide or narrowed down; all in place or scattered throughout cities; old and new buildings mixed, or they are divided across neighborhoods and/or districts. Increasingly in the past decade we come across campuses as construction sites as an attestation to neoliberal extractivist capitalism. The construction plans seem to be developed in building campuses anew rather than renovating them for accessibility. They seem to be designed for infinite construction, making the neoliberal space more debilitating for

racialized feminist academics whose location is almost always insecure. In one of the campuses that we worked in Canada, the grand opening of a new fancy and costly science building was coincidentally followed by significant budgetary cuts. The new building's operating costs increased expenses only in utilities by approximately \$1.5 million. In the same budget year many admin assistant positions—the majority are women—were cut and much-needed new academic hires were delayed particularly for social sciences departments. These were all translated into even more service and teaching load for racialized women faculty members and insecurity when they refused to comply with new measures.

Insecurity is amplified with disability. Disability in neoliberal times is an asset to justify the infrastructural needs of racial capitalism while the disabled are increasingly dispensed with in their *dysfunctions* for a market that calls for speed, flexibility and dissatisfaction with performance (Nguyen, 2018, pp. 1-25). Spaces of production, dominated by white male norms tend to have crippling effects for lower class, women and racialized/ethnicized academics. As academics working in North America, pandemic times brought in a seemingly autonomous existence for our racialized, gendered and disabled bodies. Autonomy here does not diverge from neoliberal prioritization of flexibility in work relations. Pandemic times offered tentative, limited opportunity spaces for colored, disabled women academics to manipulate time – so long as they could hold their positions. Simten found it more manageable to teach, participate in meetings, attend conferences online at home. She could manage to a great extent her daily practices according to the circulation of neural pain and fatigue rather than according to the home-office time pendulum. Gülden found it unfortunate to work off-campus since she harmonized her home-office schedules by the time when the pandemic broke. She also found it fortunate to continue her academic work at home since it became easier to breastfeed her newborn.

We swing between the physical *pros* of staying and working at home and *cons* of neoliberal flexibility priorities, which risk our bodies. The pandemic state of affairs no longer asks for work-life balance aesthetics. Thus, we can navigate through our physical disabilities in the comfort of our home spaces. But we are constantly called into work overtime—reminiscent of *time-space compression* (Harvey, 1990). We recall participating in long academic discussions, critical feminist workshops, collaborative writing processes, rights-based advocacy meetings, let alone online classes. The spatial homogeneity creates the illusion that we could attend every meeting one after another. Here, feminist collegiality and friendship help us keep constant awareness of the neoliberal illusion of flexibility—of our bodies, the time, and the space. One example is the bi-weekly meetings we had within the scope of Feminist and Queer Researchers Network, an online platform that connects feminist and queer researchers from Turkey in and outside the universities. The meetings were held to share and reflect together on our daily experiences during the pandemic. Another one is a feminist collective story-telling group that we had started before the pandemic, the Sewing Machine, which had already taken a regular course when the pandemic hit. It worked as a safe space where we turned our experiences into multi-dimensional narrations of imagination, we talked into the possible extensions of immediate life stories to mediated accounts of multiple characters who would meet in plots of different geographies. The way we wrote together has been a collective production process.

## Means of Knowledge Production

Feminists step into academic workplaces as marginalized claimants to knowledge power. The marginalization of feminist knowledge takes a sharp turn when the academics are racialized and when they do not carry the established academic ethos on their (dis)abled bodies. Although class monopoly over knowledge production in the universities seems to be debilitated by the increasing peripheralization of campuses in Turkey, and by the increase in admissions of people

with lower class backgrounds to academic posts in Canada and the United States, white, male, middle and/or upper-class assets of academic life persist. Gülden recalls the disadvantage that she was forced into by one of her professors—male, white, heterosexual—in her first year in Canada as an international ESL graduate student. Despite that she got A's for written assignments, she was assessed with a B+ for the final grade since she rarely talked in the class, and since the participation portion of the final grade was only tied to participation in class discussions. This adversely affected her future academic prospects—both her Ph.D. applications as well as her eligibility for grants and bursaries. She also felt it necessary to explain the B+ in one of her job applications, which required transcripts.

Peripheralization and lower-class admissions do not mean the recognition of racialized feminist voices in academic spaces. In Turkey peripheralization worked in two ways: First, more and more people from peripheral backgrounds gained access to academic professions, which had previously been populated by urban, bureaucratic, upper-middle class people, mostly with family ties to the academic positions. Second, starting with the late 1990s increasing number of universities were founded outside the urban centers. Racialized feminist women still must dare to speak up their claims to the male spaces in the universities.

Knowledge workers' access to the means of production is limited to the policy preferences of administrative bodies in the universities, and the broader neoliberal measures increasingly make it difficult to access required technology, library resources, accessible office and classroom spaces for academics. Feminist knowledge producers (even more so, racialized and those from the Global South) have been impacted more than others as the budget preferences challenged the need to subscribe to feminist journals, to make spaces accessible and inclusive for women, as well as to integrate feminist priorities into knowledge production processes. It is relatively recent that we could see gender studies—not feminist studies—listed among the key terms in application forms for promotion to Associate Professorship in Turkey. Likewise, working in male dominant Political Science departments—not necessarily in terms of the number of heterosexual male staff—in most of her career, Simten had to justify the relevance of gender-related course proposals to the curriculum, as well as their particular social utility for students. She could bypass the interventions by administrators who indirectly questioned feminist interventions to History of Political Thought and Political Theory courses. She was not successful in convincing the university administrations to include subscriptions to feminist journals. Feminist knowledge remained in exile from library shelves and online databases.

Feminist knowledge is exiled to domestic spaces, spheres of non-public world in mainstream academic life. Its credits in neoliberal universities are mainly based on its capacity to attract funding—i.e., its capacity to speak to the project-based interests of the decision-makers on campuses. In a way, feminist academics are called to clean the academic houses in return of temporary budgets. They are left to arbitrary decisions of the householders on budgetary considerations. It is the Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) programs and departments that are among the first target groups to *amalgamate* in response to budget cuts, proposed by the provincial governments in Canada—certainly, overwhelming political tendencies matter in this respect: WGSS bodies are most at risk in provinces with conservative governments. Regardless of the benefits that these programs offer to the broader society, to the campus and to other programs they are dispensable in crisis times. Maura, one of Simten's interviewees from a public university in Ontario, Canada notes shut downs in women's studies programs 'because there were not enough people.' (November 2, 2016) This lack of interest on the part of the students relates to the funding opportunities in the country. Another interviewee, Jay underlines the lasting impact of 'defunding feminism', that had started by the Harper government in 2016 (November 1, 2016). There has been no major change during the Trudeau's liberal government. Gülden, too, immediately experiences the sharp turn in

the budget cuts during the COVID-19 pandemic under the conservative government of Alberta that target critical, interdisciplinary, feminist research and teaching programs in the universities. Strong-Boag (2014, p.207) adds to these first-hand account: "[T]he movements speaking for justice – whether feminist, Indigenous or labour – were all dismissed as "special interest" and unrepresentative of conservative "majority" supposedly represented by conservative loyalists.

The dispensability of feminist knowledge is also related to mainstream academic language. Language as a means of knowledge production is a concern when we do not speak in the neoliberal, white, male vocabulary. The strict separation of the abstract talk from everyday language, the treatment of everyday experiences as mere data for *higher* conceptualizations, and their exclusion from theoretical argumentation lock feminists into ghettos. We are called to behave ourselves when we raise the significance of racialized and gendered bodies for theorization. Gülden's experiences in critical security studies circles are telling of the racial neglect in critical research on the rise and development of national security and securitization of human existence. Insistence on the necessity to read security with an anti-racist lens is subject to silence and/or dismissal by the gatekeepers on the grounds that it cannot be abstracted (Howell and Richter-Montpetit, 2020, pp. 3-22; Lentin, 2020). Likewise, our co-authored feminist intervention in reading the connection between national and social security policies in Turkey met a reviewer's masculinist denial of the relation between state violence against Kurds and the deepening economic crisis—despite the data we used to substantiate the links.

Hierarchies of knowledge speak in the vocabulary of white supremacy, colonizing the concepts that are developed from within immediate and indirect experiences, and struggles by the suppressed peoples and groups. Academic language also signifies the colonial division of intellectual labor across nation-states. The English language persists as the hegemonic scholarly language of knowledge production across the Global South. In many post-colonial settings and in countries with supposedly no colonial pasts instruction in English has been considered to mark privileged standards that bring in opportunities for upward mobility for the lower classes and international reputation for the upper classes. Academics are usually required to fulfill criteria that are associated with the high-ranking academic institutions in the Global North. Academic promotion is mostly based on publications in journals with high impact factors in the Global North. This requires excellent command of English as one's academic writing language; and the capacity to teach in English in a country with a different official language.

Another challenge comes with grant applications. Always a matter of condensing academic research interests into marketable tasks, grant application processes exemplify the relation between free market mentality and modern universities. Neoliberal universities promoted this relation as a *sine-qua-non* for ideal academic profiles. Regardless of the socio-political contexts, adjusting academic language to project mentality has proved to be a constant. It takes a different effort to write down projects, emphasizing the *productivity, efficiency and manageability* of the research at hand. The language itself invites feminist academics to competition. As we *dared* to apply for a grant in Canada as a visiting professor from the Global South, and an immigrant post-doctoral researcher, we were advised to include an established, tenured, white, male academic as principal applicant. On another occasion in Turkey, Simten has participated in selection committees in the country's principal scientific research institution, TÜBİTAK. The trend there is similar to other neoliberal settings: those who are well-versed in free market terminology, with previous and similar research, funded by the same agencies, and with networking capacities tend to collect the fruits of the grant application processes. Inequity persists at the institutional level: the *prestigious* universities of the center offer expert assistance to the academics in due processes. Research officers themselves are part of the

neoliberalization process. The research offices in small universities of the periphery, have relatively insignificant effects in the grant mechanism. Apart from the problems with pushing academic research to market-based funding search, the assessment processes are clearly subjective: claiming the objectivity of what is already subjective is one of the main venues where racialized, unequal, and gendered knowledge is reproduced.

## Knowledge Dissemination and Exchange Practices

In the concluding part of the *Equity Myth* where the writers reflect on challenging the myth they explain the state of neoliberal affairs in academic worlds: "Neoliberalism's rise has brought precarious work and an academic culture of 'survival of the fittest,' where fitness is defined as the productivity of those who publish in top-ranked journals and win the largest grants." (Henry *et.al.* 2017, p. 300) Journals are ranked in line with their conformity to the dynamics of academic free-markets. They are ranked according to impact factors, which are determined according to the *number* of references that the articles they publish receive. We all know that referencing is more a networking asset than a thorough literature review.

Citation numbers and frequencies are correlated with the research agendas and research topics. Chosen research agendas are criticized when encountered with white academics in the Global North. Until she got her full professorship with a seemingly life-time position at a public university in Turkey, Simten played in the rules of the game by seeking to publish in high impact journals indexed in SSCI, and mostly, in English language. She tried to balance her academic research and writing interests with the requisites for promotion—this meant overworking, no proper vacation for years. As an early-career academic Gülden has similar overworking experiences. Only after she went on medical leave did she realize the dire conditions of overworking with almost no vacation for 16 years. We have long explained this self-exploitative working rhythm by putting knowledge production and dissemination through academic writing into the center of our commitment to writing in general—that it was not merely work, at all. The dynamics in the publishing sector almost turn geography into the destiny for the academics from the Global South. Unless one has access to solid networks it is hard for the academics to get their feminist theoretical works published in indexed journals of the Global North. Simten recalls reviewer notes inviting her to write less on theory more on the country she is associated with, or requesting brief historical background when discussing feminist knowledge production in Turkey *for those readers who are not knowledgeable about the country*. Gülden recalls resisting the expectations to do Turkey-specific research in her MA and Ph.D. theses as she insisted on pursuing critical reading of European theory and history. These expectations echoed even right after her Ph.D. defence. Then she was advised to develop a new research agenda involving "Kurdish question" by a committee member after she revealed her Kurdish identity. In parallel, she receives invitations to contribute to edited volumes or journals on topics that do not directly speak to her theoretical works but which relate to Turkey. She has persisted in theoretical work, which she considered to be a means for recognition in white male-dominant academic life.

Universities as workplaces also take their share from neoliberal performance credentials. We are invited to perform ourselves as efficient producers, as abled and elastic bodies, as calculative and pragmatic minds. Feminist knowledges counter this performative frame since they rely on the immediate relation between feminist practice and theory. If understood in terms of Butler's conceptualization of performativity that resonates with Arendt's emphasis on acting together, performance is familiar for feminist vocabulary: human knowledge grows in our everyday experiences; it

is not acted upon, it unfolds in acting together, and it is theorized as a part of acting together (Butler, 2009). But feminist academic knowledge is not immune to neoliberal infusion. This is observable when, for example, Simten refrained from sharing her ongoing research with her colleagues until it was out. Likewise, publishing in *credible* journals and in works by *credited editors* and publishing houses never seemed enough. Although she was involved in critical reading of neoliberal order of things, she could not refrain from the temptation to be present and visible, almost taking no break from work. For a long time she internalized the contention that writing offers a relaxing space in managing everyday difficulties—personal and professional. It was not too difficult to integrate academic writing into this relaxing space. It is no coincidence that she could distance to neoliberal performativity after her somewhat forced retirement from the university, and when she has performed as a visiting academic for five years in North.

Bringing feminist knowledge into the classroom always meets male challenges in different cultural contexts. In Turkey this might mean speaking ideology and depriving students of *true* knowledge. In the United States, except for women's/gender/sexuality studies programs and depending on the state and the university it might mean menhating discourse, potential discrimination against anti- and/or non-feminists and/or as Simten was told in response to a mid-term course evaluation that she voluntarily handed to a multi-disciplinary classroom in a Feminist Political Thought course, it might mean "preaching" not "teaching." In Canada it might mean repetitive talk on men's aggressiveness, women's victimhood, and/or a set of memorizable inequality patterns that gives students free hand to bypass free-thinking. This is one of the main reasons why Simten for a long-time evaded claiming feminist identity in the classroom in Turkey, while teaching feminist knowledge without naming it. Doing so might help one to go around possible patriarchal intrusions into the classroom dynamics for some time. This preference ties to hooks' distinction between teaching feminist theory in the abstract and sharing feminist theory in everyday conversation. As hooks underlines, "...theoretical talk emerges from the concrete, from my efforts to make sense of everyday life experiences, from my efforts to intervene critically in my life and the lives of others" (hooks, 1994, p.70). Gülden depicts her most problematic experiences in teaching in Canada in relation to Middle Eastern men. She connects this to their stance vis-a-vis white women academics whom they stand at a distance in terms of identity, and whose superiority in knowledge they find easier to accept. We are called into negotiations between presumed identities, derived from our skin colors, ethnic backgrounds, accents, and geographical pasts on the one hand, and our knowledge and the way we produce and share it on the other hand. We do not dismiss our pasts; we wear them as sites of our experiences against racial assumptions. Feminist knowledge helps here.

## In Conclusion – Contestations in Everyday Academic Life

Neoliberal knowledge production processes are not identical across countries, states, and provinces. The discourses might be similar, the academic criteria might be the same, and the spatial constructions of neoliberal knowledge regimes might overlap. However, the ways they are experienced differ. In all cases, the exploitative mechanism persists along class, gender, and racial dimensions. Thus, our accounts are not exceptional; they represent systematic unfolding of neoliberal management on university sites. They represent the ideal-typical academic identities, and their possible implications in everyday academic lives. In this respect, they affect our academic prospects, our career plans, and the way we write and speak.

The way we write and speak as well as the way we relate to each other on academic planes also give hints for developing alternatives and counter-dispositions. Alternatives emerge as we navigate neoliberal academia. This means more manipulating the neoliberal order of

things than challenging it all at once. We tend to walk on a tightrope between individual performances through our works and our feminist considerations for collaborative work. This comes in with serial publications on the one hand and compromises from our times and spaces outside the work life, and mostly staking our health. Manipulation works relatively easily when it comes to benefiting marginalized students and early-career academics.

Feminist conversations help us explore ways and means to challenge the patriarchal intrusions into our syllabi, teaching styles and contents of lectures. Sharing observations of each other's works, daily encounters on campuses and especially in and with administrative bodies are functional in getting to know the multiplicity of patriarchal hurdles that await feminist knowledge production, as well as the risks of integration into neoliberal discursive practices. Non-white, critical feminist knowledge production offers the grounds for countering extensions of colonial knowledge in post-colonial times: it enables feminist writing that reveals the hidden inequalities in the supposedly balanced meritocracy of the academic world. It turns upside down the separation between theory and practice by substantiating the inseparability of the two. It presents multiple examples of the exploitative unfolding of white, male, colonial knowledge through centuries. As feminist academics we experience the radical implications of feminist solidarity that works against racist, class-based, patriarchal knowledge patterns. This, we could do to a certain degree, frequently having to adjust to neoliberal academic life through marketing our products, our knowledge, language and teaching skills. In classes, we search for ways to by-pass male means of assessment by bringing in alternative forms of participation that consider the possibility of silence as comfort zones for vulnerable students and thus, that do not necessarily ask for leading roles, or aggressive in-class performance.

Writing does not have to be a solitary activity; it does not have to be practiced in "a room of one's own." Our writing processes are always a matter of fine-tuning. Co-writing and writing in any place offer spaces for contestation (Anzaldúa, 2015[1980]). We tend to produce collaborative texts that merge different planes of everyday life in feminist knowledge: collective story writing (Sewing Machine collective), feminist journal publishing (Feminist Asylum: A Journal of Critical Interventions). In all the examples, we learn and create together. These acts are not limited to the texts that come out of the writing process but they speak into our academic engagements at every level.

Feminist knowledge is knowledge in exile. If exile means one's forced distancing from the lands that she was born into and grown, if it means forced dissociation from the lands where she accidentally comes to exist and grows into being, then it would be apt to locate feminist knowledge in exile in the broader modern knowledge systems. If exile connotes new territorial boundaries, new identity claims, and new contradictions in one's claims to rights—void and potential—then feminist knowledge can aptly be situated as knowledge in exile: pushing the borders, staking them and established identities, but at the same time searching for established identities, a place secured in existing borders.

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**Gülden Özcan & Simten Coşar**

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