



Feminist Writing in and of Asylum

Feminist Asylum Editorial Collective

ABSTRACT

Editorial introductions for the first issue of Feminist Asylum: A Journal of Critical Interventions

KEYWORDS

Feminist writing, Feminist Asylum, women and LGBTI+ in exile, queer knowledge



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FEMINIST WRITING IN & OF ASYLUM

It is with bittersweet excitement that we are launching our long-planned journal, *Feminist Asylum: A Journal of Critical Interventions*. We have traveled a long way to reach this point. We started as a group of three, Gülден, Leyla, and Simten. Then, we met with more people and groups in different parts of the world; had discussions and debates; drafted and re-drafted; and gave up plans and made newer ones. We finally *landed* at the University of Pittsburgh, ULS, with Dr. Nancy Glazener joining as our liaison editor at the University of Pittsburgh. At that point, Dr. Caroline Hodes (Canada), Şafak Altan (France), and Dr. Işıl Ünal (Turkey) joined us. And now we also have Timothy Maddocks as our liaison editor at City of Asylum (Pittsburgh).

As we were moving forward with this issue, we tried to integrate earlier ways in which feminist/women's writing has been envisioned. Virginia Woolf crucially noted the need for a room of one's own as an indispensable space for women writing. If we turn to her novel *Orlando*, we recognize this need also for subjects who deny binary identities, who stand outside heteronormative identity spaces. Woolf's claim is located in the modernist movement where the individual emerges as the main actor. Woolf's stream-of-consciousness narration captures the marginality of her characters' situations, including their constitution outside of masculine-dominated heteronormativity. This attention to marginalized lives and resistance connects with our appreciation, in this journal, for writing that crosses borders and breaks with the norms regulating gender and sexuality. Woolf's approach is one of the building blocks of our understanding of feminist writing. She calls attention also to people in history who resist the impossibility of writing unless one is male and/or prosperous.

Feminist Asylum has a managing editor (Dr. Simten Coşar) and two liaison editors connecting the journal to its supporting institutions. But these are just symbolic positions put into action when technical and institutional requisites arise. The editors work as a collective. We do not have a calculated division of responsibilities: how many hours to work, how many texts to work on, what to do and when to do it. We have our calendars — individual, institutional and collective — and we try our best to have them work in harmony.

Our excitement and joy about being able to launch this long-dreamed-of journal is bittersweet. Dr. Gülден Özcan (Canada), one of the founders of this journal, passed away on May 11, 2022, due to complications from breast cancer. Gülден actively participated in the process, from brainstorming about our preliminary ideas to settling on a name for the journal, organizing discussions, recruiting new members, drafting policy papers, and deciding the themes of the first four issues. Gülден was a Kurdish feminist academic and activist and mother of three-year-old Ekim. Although her life on this earth proved to be short, she touched many people's lives. She was one of those rare persons who can align her academic, intellectual work with her activist concerns.

The first issue of *Feminist Asylum* opens with a special section dedicated to Gülден, and because of Gülден's commitments, this section also launches the theme of this issue: Writing in & of Asylum. Introducing the vision at the heart of the journal, these texts in "Honoring Gülден Özcan" relate to the feminist academic state of being in exile and seeking, envisioning, and creating asylum. The works in this section were all delivered as talks at a ceremony where Gülден received an Excellence in Equity Award from the Support

Network for Academics of Colour Plus at the University of Lethbridge. We write to come to terms with this loss as well as to register Gülден's important contribution to the work of this journal. Almost 60 years after Woolf's "A Room of One's Own," Tezer Özlü (2014, p. 10) sounded another note important to our work: "We write because the world is a sad place. We write because emotions surge. It is pretty difficult to overcome one's helplessness. But once we leave it behind then we can have a say in our lives. We write because we want to talk about this sort of control . . . I write to come to terms with life and death."

After this introductory section, our first issue offers a range of contributions, including original research, interviews, creative works, and re-publications of foundational and generative texts. The first piece is an English translation of Jale Parla's discussion of whether epic, a notoriously masculine genre, can contribute to women's freedom from a feminist perspective. We did not reprint the original Turkish version since it was published in an open access feminist journal, *Feminist Approaches in Culture and Politics*, but we offer Simten Coşar's English translation here. The next contribution is a foundational discussion by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson of counter-hegemonic, decolonial ways of knowing grounded in indigenous thought. Taken from her book, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (2017), this chapter also highlights the "Kwe" identity as one that does not conform to rigid gender binaries, that has the capacity to include both cis and trans experiences, and that generates knowledge by drawing on spirit, emotion, intellect, and the kinetics of place-based practice (30).

This issue features two interviews. One is a reprint of an interview that Hande Ögüt conducted with novelist Oya Baydar in Turkish on the occasion of the Amargi Feminist Meetings in 2008. We also offer an English translation. The interview focuses on Baydar's novel, *Kayıp Söz (The Lost Word)*, but the conversation expands to touch on questions of responsible writing, conscientious literature, women's social existence in a world shaped by patriarchy, life under repressive regimes, and other obstacles to social justice. Baydar's interview and her novel speak to the heart of our concerns in this issue, since her main character is male but living in a state of hesitancy, a state often identified with women's everyday experiences. The second interview, hot off the press, is a conversation with AMOQA, the members of the Athens Museum of Queer Arts, a safe space for feminist queer activism. The interview is conducted by Nihan Kuzu, a member of our editorial collective, who is herself living in exile in Greece while talking with AMOQA about forming and re-forming queer spaces for those who are exiled in physical, symbolic, and/or political terms.

Working across languages is an important dimension of exile and asylum to which *Feminist Asylum* is committed, beginning with Turkish and English and aiming eventually to include other languages. The final two essays in this issue are in English (by Defne Karaosmanoğlu et. al) and Turkish (by Remzi Altunpolat) and take up counter-hegemonic ways of knowing in two very different registers. Karaosmanoğlu et.al share with us the first observations from their research project about the historical unfolding of women's relations with home appliances in Turkey. This is a broad, laborious project with multi-dimensional implications and multi-method tools. Identifying domestic space as a technological zone, the researchers focus on women's understandings of their experiences with technology in their cultural and political worlds. Altunpolat's essay

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addresses both social and academic forms of counter-hegemonic knowledge production, highlighting Queer forms of knowledge that challenge heteronormative and capitalist ways of understanding the world and distributing value.

Finally, we are fortunate to be able to include work by an artist-in-exile from our affiliated intellectual circle, City of Asylum in Pittsburgh. Tuhin Das, who draws and writes about exile in pandemic times, shares three of their drawings accompanied by passages from three of their poems.

A first issue of a journal is like life itself: exciting, joyful, worrisome, and more. As we close our first message to you, our readers, we once more convey our respect, thankfulness, and love for our colleague, friend, and collective member, Dr. Gülden Özcan. In particular, we appreciate and hope to keep summoning the wisdom, joy, and never-ending energy that she brought to feminist collaboration. This issue is dedicated to her loving memory, which is with us through time and writing, writing in time, as we pursue this work in the spirit of Gloria Anzaldúa's reframing of Woolf's idea (1981, p. 170): "Forget the room of one's own — write in the kitchen, lock yourself up in the bathroom. Write on the bus or the welfare line, on the job or during meals, between sleeping or waking. I write while sitting on the john. No long stretches at the typewriter unless you're wealthy or have a patron — you may not even own a typewriter. While you wash the floor or clothes listen to the words chanting in your body. When you're depressed, angry, hurt, when compassion and love possess you. When you cannot help but write."

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