Editorial Introduction: Special Issue: Time, Urgency, and Collaboration in the Corporate University

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Editorial Introduction
Special Issue: Time, Urgency, and Collaboration in the Corporate University

Fatima El-Tayeb and Maria Stehle, guest editors

The first seed for this collaboration was planted at a workshop on Just Futures in Colorado in 2017, which brought together a transnational, interdisciplinary, multiracial group of scholars united by an intersectional approach to feminist collective care within, against, and beyond the corporate university. Some of us reunited two years later at the NWSA conference in Atlanta and decided to put out a proposal and a call for papers in order to continue and broaden the conversation. The result is this special issue, a product of an ongoing exchange with old and new collaborators—our editors, editorial team, the cover artist, poet, and the authors of this issue. Along the way, we confronted new and familiar challenges that emphasized the urgency of the issues addressed here. Over the last two years, it often seemed as if we were running out of time for a desperately needed turnaround, while simultaneously, time often seemed to slow down to the point of immobility.

The global pandemic and the global anti-racist protests in the wake of George Floyd’s murder both showed, albeit in drastically different ways, how quickly things can change—and how quickly seemingly seismic shifts in economic conditions and political awareness can be folded back into a new normal that looks disturbingly similar to the old one. As Danika Medak-Saltzman, Deepti Misri, and Beverly Weber point out in their contribution, in the United States, COVID-19 caused university administrations to ask for and temporarily practice a level of flexibility and understanding for the pressures and commitments (tenure-track) faculty, staff, and students face in and beyond the institution that is considered incompatible with the corporate university under “normal” circumstances. And indeed, 2021 saw a forced return to the normal, pushed by economic considerations, that marked the end of flexibility and of the recognition of academic workers as complete human beings.

In 2020, there also was a seeming collective awakening of—largely white—university chairs, deans, and presidents to the reality of anti-Black racism. This
resulted in a deluge of statements, proposals and, sometimes, new initiatives. Yet again, with the election of Biden, this crisis was perceived to be over and Black faculty, students, and staff are expected to continue to function within institutions and a nation that remain as anti-Black as they have always been (see Belay 2020).

In other words, the same tendencies that were at play in society at large played out in the academic context: temporary accommodations for those with relative privilege and job security, calls for solidarity that, while they were often sincere, created the illusion of collective interest without improving the situation of those who were expected to provide the labor that made temporary flexibility for some feasible. This is equally true on the transnational level, where the Global South is quite literally left to die, so that the North can return to a comfortable normal (and poor and racialized communities within the South are sacrificed by national elites and multinationals, see AFP 2021). The crisis management, thus, looked suspiciously like business as usual, the exposure to vulnerability of those who are usually protected from it notwithstanding. As Medak-Saltzman, Misri, and Weber as well as Kelly Opdycke in her piece on contingent faculty observe, the very existence of the corporate university is built on a system in which the precarity of the majority provides for the relative security of the few. And as often, the crisis was instrumentalized to entrench these conditions. Academia is no exception: Elite universities saw huge gains on their endowments while community colleges are struggling to survive and lip-service to “diversity” does not translate into job security.

We began this work with the conviction that transnational, intersectional collaborative strategies are urgently needed in response to the global rise of neo-nationalism within a persistent system of neoliberal racial capitalism: violence, poverty and displacement are escalating while wealth disparities continue to increase. A mainstreamed rhetoric of “entitlement abuse” and “special rights” continues to undermine commitments to equitable access to education and resources. Meanwhile, the Left’s organized response is marred by internal conflicts around so-called “identity politics” identified with feminist, queer, and racialized positionalities. Economic and political precarity, travel restrictions and bans, anti-genderism and anti-immigration discourses, and hostility against academics and intellectuals around the globe form new interconnected systems of surveillance to hinder and intimidate connections and collaboration.

These violent forms of oppression and suppression, these tensions and inequalities, have only grown since the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic. In line with Boggs et al.’s invitation to take up an abolitionist approach to the university, this special issue focuses not only on the challenges of doing political work in the context of neoliberal appropriations but aims to find paths for critical practice and resistance. This, we hope, “offers the occasion for thinking about the university in ways that the institution itself might
otherwise render impossible. And in doing so it may offer an occasion to trouble the institution as we know and inhabit it—and as it inhabits us.6

The articles in the volume provide new feminist theorizations, practices, and pedagogies through and about collaboration that challenge the dominance of North American education models by reconceptualizing the temporalities of the neoliberal academy. Universities increasingly become targets in the new culture wars initiated by neo-nationalist forces everywhere, be it through crackdowns on critical academics and students by increasingly authoritarian neoliberal governments in Turkey or India, massive online harassment of feminist scholars in supposedly stable democracies such as Germany or censorship of BDS initiatives in the United States. Meanwhile, curriculum-building and public scholarship that serve university “diversity” missions are valued only if they can be tightly connected to improved recruitment and retention numbers and are rarely adequately considered in tenure and promotion processes. Co-teaching, collaborative writing and cross-disciplinary collaborations are frequently discouraged.

In other words, this is a university that values collaborations as long as they produce measurable, assessable outcomes, grants, patents, or “innovation.” Self-care and wellness are employed in the service of productivity and as forms of self-optimization. Neoliberal racial capitalism is driven by the “clock” of assessment and heteronormative and ableist understandings of time and productivity. Productivity translates into numbers and speed, resources are distributed based on seemingly neutral algorithms, while teaching and scholarship are assessed in terms of numerically measurable outcomes. Thus, while right wing movements frame academia as a hub of subversive, radical thinking and activism, innovation and collaboration in the service of transformation often face institutional obstacles.

The contributions in this volume focus on collaborative strategies that challenge neoliberal notions of productivity and time championed in Western models of academic knowledge production and build new collective forms of creating and sharing transformative knowledge. Our volume includes academic articles and more personal and creative formats that draw, among other theories, on feminist and queer critiques of racial capitalism, on concepts of queer time and futurity, crip time, settler spacetime, decolonial theory and critical race theory. The articles emphasize the historical dimensions in these discussions, the colonial legacies and the complexities of and necessity for transnational activism and theorizations. The struggle and the resistances are often local, specific to certain institutional, regional, or national contexts yet always embedded in transnational structures of settler-colonialism and global racial capitalism.

As our contributors show, activism, even if it is specific to the academic context, is not limited to the academy. Scholar-activists and scholar-artists work within, outside of, and between institutional, national, and temporal boundaries; the kinds of collaborations that the articles describe are founded.
in friendship, care, and love. The emphasis in the essays in this volume is not just on identifying injustice and violence but on creating paths for alternatives to emerge, to, with cover artist Althea Murphy-Price, position anew, create new spaces and paces, new materials, notions of beauty, and forms of resistance, to build communities and collaborations that will “imagine otherwise” (Sharpe 2006, 115) and make different collaborations and worlds possible.

On Our Cover Art

Althea Murphy-Price received her B.A. in Fine Art from Spelman College before completing her Master of Arts in Printmaking and Painting at Purdue University and her Master of Fine Arts at Tyler School of Art, Temple University. She has published and exhibited nationally as well as internationally, in the US, in Spain, China, Japan, Italy and Sweden. Her work is also included in the public collections of the Huntsville Museum of Art, Knoxville Museum of Art, and the Bernard A. Zuckerman Museum of Art. The image we choose for our cover entitled “Black Bird Girl” is part of a series of recent works that are inspired by the hashtag #blackromantic. In Murphy-Price’s own words, this work is about timing and time, about positioning, weight, and awkwardness, and about beauty and rarity. Black girlhood, visibility, and claiming place and space are at the center of this work. Murphy-Price writes, “I make work in awareness of both representation and anti-representation. Portraits of young African American girls in “Goody Girl” are wearing ornate headdresses made out of seemingly fun hair clips, barrettes and ties. We gaze at the back of each girl sitting alone against a towering black backdrop. These girls appear on display or weighted down by the exaggerated accessories on their heads” (Murphy-Price, Artist Statement).

On a formal level, Murphy-Price’s work has been acknowledged for its non-conventional approach to the traditions of printmaking. Utilizing lithography, stenciling methods, photography and 3D printing, her work represents printmaking’s many different aspects. Rooted in printmaking, Murphy-Price describes herself as a transmedia artist. Her work is conceptual; she works with installations, sculptures, and objects; she prints not on paper but on different media, often in dimensional forms as she works with 3D printing, for example of hair, hair pieces, clips, and lace. This conceptual approach can be seen in her multi-layered work on hair. In mixed media work, Murphy-Price explores the haptic quality of hair and of hair as an element of deception when she, for example, creates prints with synthetic hair. The association of hair with beauty also conjures questions of uniqueness and rarity that are closely tied to the deeply racialized discourses about hair. Much of this work is sculptural but Murphy-Price also continues to exhibit prints and photographs of her printed, sculptural objects.

Murphy-Price’s work contributes to “contemporary Black public image-making” in what Christina Sharpe describes in In the Wake: On Blackness
and Being as “refusals to accede to the optics, the disciplines, and the deathly demands of the antiblack worlds in which we live, work, and struggle to make visible (to ourselves, if not to others) all kinds of Black pasts, presents, and possible futures” (115). Sharpe describes this work as “imaginings of the fullness of Black life” (115) and as creating ways to “imagine otherwise.”

The endeavor to imagine otherwise most closely connects Murphy-Price’s work to the essays in this volume. Other topics we find in her art, such as time and timing, positioning and positionality, and finding paths for resistance also weave themselves through this special issue. “Black Bird Girl” especially resonates through its focus on traces of presences that are ignored and/or unwanted, yet persistently remain. This special issue similarly invites you to ask what and where the traces of feminist resistance to and the marginalized presences within the corporate university are. Can these traces form a pattern of alternative formations similar to the hair clippings? What forms of resistance are hidden until we see the pattern, yet persist under the pressures of the neoliberal, corporate university? The texts collected here express the urgent need for change, while also urging us to slow down and look closely, to refuse the urgency of the tenure clock, the capitalist demand to produce always more, always faster, to take time to build sustainable and sustaining collaborations.

(Tenure) Clocks, Care, and Crip Time

Photographic and print processes are always about time, timing, and exposure, repetition and complexity. The question of how to understand and resist the ways in which time, clocks, and deadline pressures operate form a common thread in the articles in this special issue. How can a different conceptualization of time and timelines form a basis for resisting the pressures of the neoliberal temporality of the corporate university?

Medak-Saltzman, Misri, and Weber show that time is one of the bullies of the academic system, where “ableist time and settler time intersect in the . . . production of the tenure process as an endurance test in which only the fittest survive, a process that values an isolated scholar disconnected from the communities in which they may live, thrive, care or be cared for” (Medak-Saltzman, Misri, and Weber). Thus, Loner and Rosenau argue, the “way forward . . . is best described as not an individual step, but rather a universalizing one—with all of us taking time out from our unmaking in order to best address how we deal with our bully once and for all” (Loner and Rosenau). In their contribution, they engage in a conversation with artists and disability and social justice advocacy work to suggest collective organizing against exploitation that is so often a result of “capitalism’s temporal bullying.”

This concept also speaks to the Star Fem Co*Lab’s push towards research collaborations that emphasize process rather than outcome.1 Star Fem Co*Lab describe the work of their science collaborative as the work of
ambivalence—located in a structure that the authors know as oppressive. As scholar-activists, they position themselves within the university but not of it. Collaboration, they argue, is about care and world-building, not goal but process-oriented, where time and energies can “flow like water.” They stress the urgency of finding modes to work “together in the university in ways that are sustaining, non-extractive, and autonomous.” The group claims “an ambivalent autonomous zone” that “tensely inhabit[s] the material and affective condition of being situated in the neoliberal university while dreaming and building alternatives to it.” They critically engage the challenges of sustaining feminist, decolonial, collaborative structures both within an institution deeply suspicious of such collective work and the challenges of working with marginalized communities without replicating the university’s extractive approach (a challenge that is also thematized by Alvarado and Younes). Ambivalent autonomous zones offer one model for creating spaces from which to resist temporal bullying and the “norms” and the “normal” and bend time to create spaces for “alternative habitations of time” (Medak-Saltzman, Misri, and Weber) that “center relationships over productivities.”

Urgency: Against Precarity, Contingency, and Isolation

The authors in the previous section convincingly point to the need to slow down, to reject the urgency of crisis discourses, of tenure clocks, of the “bully” (academic) time in order to create space for resistance. At the same time, they acknowledge that this move does not yet overcome the imbalance between those on the tenure clock and those whose positioning in precarious survival mode allows no slowing down. The latter provide the feminized, racialized, and largely invisible labor that makes possible the existence of the ever-shrinking class of securely employed academics, allowing the neoliberal university to represent itself as the heir and protector of a long tradition of individual (white, male) intellectual brilliance—notwithstanding all the violence and ambivalence this brings for all those within this class who do not fit the description. There is a sense of urgency to push back against the regulatory and isolating mechanisms of time as they so often coincide with an increase in precarious employment for many. The authors in this section resist the myth of the disembodied intellectual by explicitly using (auto) ethnography to zoom in on the experiences of those who embody difference in the academy.

Rhunette Diggs and Kirsten Isgro, in their auto-ethnography about their friendship between a Black and white scholar, put their different “teacher-scholar-parent time experiences in dialogue” to create a call for creative, spiritual, self-ethnographic approaches to di-unital time. By exploring their different positionalities, Diggs and Isgro work through the complexities of negotiating larger shared goals. Friendship, in their article, is central to creating bridges
to and for each other, for connecting, and for offering mutual support. Kelly Opdycke’s contribution lays out how the urgency of survival faced by contingent faculty produces a different kind of slowing down of time, one that the author experiences as stuckness, as the failure to advance along a normative timeline that we are taught to internalize as meritocracy. Failure to be normative is thus framed as individual failure and the structure of contingency is enforcing isolation, barely leaving time, space or energy for collective resistance—which nonetheless takes place, see e.g. the University of California graduate students’ fight for Cost of Living adjustments (COLA) or the UC’s unionized lecturers decision to authorize a strike after year-long negotiations failed. In both cases, the administration’s reaction reflects the lack of validation for those who provide the vast majority of teaching. This, as Opdycke traces, includes teaching the bulk of “equity, diversity, and inclusion” (EDI) courses; courses which universities like to point to as practical reflection of their commitment to doing better. The actual work of providing equity, diversity, and inclusion is thus performed disproportionately by communities who remain under-resourced and whose inclusion is still tentative, limited, and contingent on the goodwill of an institution that remains hostile to their presence.

This dynamic is central in the section’s last piece as well. Leigh-Anna Hidalgo, Christine Vega, Nora Alba Cisneros, JoAnna Michelle Reyes, the four authors of the collaborative article “Cords that Bind,” reflect on their activism as Mothers of Color in Academia (MOCA) from auto-ethnographic perspectives. From the lack of lactation rooms to inflexible timelines and policies, they are constantly reminded that they do not belong. Participation is made almost impossible and this impossibility to perform normatively is then framed as individual failure rather than structural deficiency. This structural hostility became more pronounced during the pandemic, despite half-hearted supportive declarations and calls for “flexibility.” The move to online teaching not only at universities and colleges but also most (public) schools, exposed the ongoing stark disparities in childcare labor. And while overall employment is growing in 2021, more women are leaving than joining the labor force, largely due to these disparities. Meanwhile, the United States remains one of seven nations globally that do not offer any form of universal paid family leave (Long 2021, Rupp 2021). While there are differences between their individual positionalities as racialized mothers within the academy, in their collective activism, the authors highlight the “cords” that “converge through the shared experience of erasures and invisibility.” As they embark on their campus actions, they describe how the bonds they “have developed as a collective are deeply rooted in the love, respect and dignity we feel as mothers and co-mothers/ co-madres” (Hidalgo et al). Positionality, in the contributions to this volume, is about fighting against isolation, precarity, and contingency. By presenting models of being present for each other in connections, friendships, and collective activism these essays forge paths towards a more just university.
Collaboration, Decoloniality, and Transnational Solidarity

Taking up a main theme that is part of all the essays in this volume, the contributions in this section offer in-depth explorations of the potentials and challenges of activism and academia in local and transnational contexts, extending beyond disciplinary and national boundaries and borders. They explore the intersections of the circulation of knowledge, colonial conquest, and the enforcement of the European education model. Through historicizing the corporate university beyond the US, they show that it is not a recent “perversion” of a formerly better system but the logical outcome of the traditional role of universities in systems of power. Simultaneously, they point to the privileged position of US academia as a site of desire for scholars outside the United States, both reflecting the nation’s global imperialist dominance and the transformation of US institutions as a result of liberation and student movements in the 1960s, institutionalizing disciplines that promised to offer structural critiques of exactly this dominance.

Tania Mancheno and Naz Al-Windi’s article centers on forming a women of color collective as a space from which to push back against the alienation and isolation non-normative subjects are routinely exposed to in the corporate university. The authors’ location in Hamburg, Germany, points to the globalization of the corporate university model as well as to the global impact of racial capitalism. Importantly, their intervention traces the colonial roots of the university, not only in (settler) colonies but also and especially in Europe itself, where this history is still largely negated. European universities were never distant from national imperialist projects; on the contrary, they were centrally involved in their conceptualization as well as implementation and profited from them through the extraction of capital, labor, art, and knowledge. In the case of Hamburg University, this connection is explicit in the institution’s early 20th century founding as a “colonial institute.” The authors trace this history and its ambivalent inclusion in official narratives and conclude that “the colonial history of the university is a central barrier in the process of decolonizing the experiences of women of color and Black women in German academia.” By creating collaborative spaces for action for women of color and Black women in the academy, they aim to make what they call “white walls” visible and tangible. The piece also interrogates the challenges of building solidarity between racialized communities. Their shared position as outsiders within an institution shaped by uninterrogated whiteness creates common ground, but the pressures that this positionality brings with it also produce internal tensions. Even if coalitions cannot always be sustained, naming, and challenging the invisible white walls of the university might be “the starting point of a new beginning” (Mancheno and Al-Windi).

The issue of solidarity and difference is also central in Zeynep Korkman’s essay on Academics for Peace. This group’s initial purpose was the publication of a statement of solidarity by (mostly) Turkish and Kurdish academics with
the Kurdish minority in Turkey, targeted by escalating state violence. The Turkish government’s harsh response, resulting in numerous signatories losing their positions and a good number put on trial, shifted the focus to the topic of academic freedom and in turn produced an international solidarity movement with the blacklisted intellectuals that was in part driven by an understanding of the fragility of academic freedom everywhere. While rightly pointing to this as an important act of solidarity, Korkman also addresses the challenges posed by the actors’ different positionalities and privileges—many of the original signatories were in contingent positions—requiring a constant process of translation that could not always be successful. Thus, this example “brings into focus the potentials and limitations of academia as a transnational solidarity network” (Korkman). She concludes:

Despite the need to navigate the unequal burdens of translation and immobility, mobilizing academia as a transnational solidarity network is a worthy endeavor to persist in precisely because such political/academic work brings an alternative vision of what knowledge production could be into the heart of mainstream academia, revealing in the process what needs to bend and what needs to break in order to make room for an academia that is not yet here (Korkman).

The focus on the “not yet” and the difficulties of translation in the broadest sense are also the focus of Siihasin-Hope Alvarado and Anna-Esther Younes’ manifesto-style contribution. Their essay focuses on translating between and within academic and activist contexts in the service of a “revolutionary praxis from a queer, Indigenous, feminist perspective.” Speaking from their positionalities as a First Nation North American and a Palestinian German, they address familiar patterns of marginalizing, silencing and competitiveness in nominally progressive spaces meant to foster alliances between activists and academics. Activism within the academy needs to be decolonized, they demand, and “if theorists aren’t able to catch up on real life problems maybe it is time for them to step back and finally let others occupy the front seats” (Alvarado and Younes).

Similarly, by focusing on non-immigrant visa holders’ precarity in the US university, experienced by the majority of researchers and students from India and China, Sudeshna Chatterjee shows that “the starting point for decolonization should . . . generate critical theory from sites which are structurally and institutionally excluded from the formal-colonial and/or corporate universities” (Chatterjee). The position of non-immigrants within the corporate university offers a perspective that highlights the ways in which US universities participate in a border regime that channels migration based on US interests and produces structural precarity as a normalized form of employment for non-immigrant visa holders. Chatterjee outlines models for resistance to these border regimes by describing the decolonial possibilities of two grassroots education models in
India, the Tagorean model and the Subha group. She concludes with a call that echoes the demands of all authors in this section:

For the diversity and decolonization agendas to move beyond empty rhetoric, the approach to decolonization and diversity must be holistic, subversive of interconnected racialized hierarchies underlying global immigration regimes and constantly vigilant and critical of restrictive academic epistemes and spaces (Chatterjee).

Activism and the Corporate University: Beyond the ‘Crisis’

The contributions in the final section remind us of the dual challenge of decolonizing the university, potentially leading to its dissolution, and of making it more livable for marginalized communities while we are doing this work. This process of “hospicing the university” (Grande, in Weber et al.) acknowledges that the crisis is permanent and its periodic invocation is often strategic. Rather than using crisis as a potential moment of transformation, the perpetual neoliberal crisis management of the corporate university entrenches and enhances existing inequalities.

Dana Olwan and Carol Fadda revisit the idea of “feminist commons” as a “center of collaboration, solidarity, and collective.” These “commons” can be classrooms, administrative spaces, or research and community collaborations. The commons they imagine “are not only about survival but also about generating energies needed to build radical academic futurities. They help us ask and answer the more urgent question of what communities of care, ultimately, can a feminist commons enable us to imagine and make possible” (Olwan and Fadda).

These calls for activism are tied directly to realities people face in the corporate university, as researchers, administrators, and in the classroom. These challenges connect to the crises and crisis-discourses that are currently triggered mainly by a global pandemic. Crisis discourses are, as Fada and Olwan show, “often used to further isolate, discipline, and control its faculty and student bodies, particularly its Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) communities.” The final group of articles in our issue thus circles back to the beginning of the volume as the authors connect their calls for specific activist interventions in the academy directly to (academic) notions of time, clocks, and timing.

Natalie Loveless and Carrie Smith point out:

While many universities claim themselves to be forward thinking, interdisciplinary, and collaborative, the neoliberal university doesn’t know how to adequately quantify—that is, value—emergent, unpredictable, interdisciplinary, creative, and collective labor, which is why working this way—in local, situated ways that then, like weeds, might proliferate in the cracks—is so urgent.

. . . it is in those places where things aren’t working from the perspectives of
patriarchal power that those of us committed to feminist anti-racist decolonial universities might want to linger, having conversations like these as regularly and loudly as possible. (Loveless and Smith)

The two authors dialogue from their different positions as they reflect on what it means to try to maintain a critical distance from an institution while being placed in positions of leadership, power, and responsibility. Loveless’ mapping of her work week illustrates again the way in which time divides and simultaneously collapses division. The critical, transformative, collaborative, artistic, and interdisciplinary perspectives that both authors describe need to remain and retain this awkward positioning, again in but not of the university to foster critical dialogue about how to engage in feminist politics in or on “the ruins” (Loveless and Smith). Their perspectives on artist-scholarly collaboration echo some of the arguments in previous sections, most explicitly Loner and Rosenau’s push against capitalism’s temporal bullying.

In their contribution, Maisam Alomar and Vineeta Singh similarly suggest that research in all fields needs to turn to the interdisciplines, rather than to give in to the renewed attacks on interdisciplinary approaches modelled by Black feminist scholarship as without value in the corporate university. They convincingly argue that the complexities of the social, political, and economic causes and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be understood without broad, interdisciplinary engagements. This political emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration does not only apply to research but also to administrative actions, research, and community collaborations, as the authors propose. And they suggest that it is the interdisciplinary pedagogy of exactly those humanities fields most often threatened with elimination, such as Black or feminist studies, that “represents the only significant epistemic challenge to the unreflective valuation of the Enlightenment project that birthed both scientific and humanistic traditions of study.” Alomar and Singh conclude:

Rather than turning away from the interdisciplines and clinging to models of disciplinary knowledge production whose primary purpose is to uphold the status quo, we advocate for humanistic scholars in any and every discipline to look to the interdisciplines for blueprints on how to reorganize undergraduate study in line with the models provided by a long line of Black thinkers and student activists: to reassert the significance of collaborative knowledge production within and beyond the academy, knowledge production organized around specific sociopolitical needs, and knowledge production that announces its investments. (Alomar and Singh)

The essay section of this special issue is closed, not coincidentally, by another text focusing on pedagogy, Abeera Khan’s piece on the search for “a methodology of hope.” This search is in no way tied to the assumption that things are looking particularly hopeful. On the contrary, Khan explores the
limits of a pedagogy focused primarily on exposing the violence of racism and colonialism without sufficient attention to how these violent structures affect the classroom and the university at large. Focused on the experience of racialized students who are already intimately familiar with this violence and building on the work of Jose Muñoz, the author argues that “a methodology of hope does not seek to reconcile the violent exclusions that structure and enable the classroom. Yet, it also does not lay its pedagogical and analytical investments in the exposure of violence. Rather, it takes on the terrifying task of defiance towards the realities of our ‘broken-down present’ in order to imagine otherwise” (Khan).

Poetry of/ for Solidarity

We are delighted to include three poems by Becky Thompson, whose work received “Honorable Mention” in the 2021 Feminist Formations / NWSA Award. Thompson is a scholar, poet, and activist. Her poems, similar to many essays in this volume, are about transnational feminism, social justice, and resistance. They powerfully thematize precarity, racisms, exclusions, and violence, all exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Thompson centers the experiences of people facing forced migration, drawing attention to the urgent global dimensions of social and gender justice. The voices in her poems also always celebrate those who resist, highlighting the necessity of a feminist solidarity and resistance based on mutual recognition and respect rather than the desire to “help.” Thompson’s poetry makes space for the complexities, ironies, and sometimes hidden hierarchies in its open form, leaving us with the call for “Feminists in Solidarity”:

There are (at least) three ways to connect with people across borders.
Feminist as tourist. Terrible.
Feminist as explorer. Not good.
Feminist in solidarity. Not easy.

Fatima El-Tayeb is Professor of Ethnicity, Race & Migration and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Yale University. Her research interests include Black Europe, comparative diaspora studies, queer of color critique, critical Muslim studies, decolonial theory, transnational feminisms, visual culture studies, race and technology, and critical European studies. She is the author of three books and numerous articles on the interactions of race, gender, sexuality, religion, and nation. Here current research projects explore the intersecting legacies of colonialism, fascism, and socialism in Europe and the potential of (queer) People of Color alliances in decolonizing the continent.

Maria Stehle is Professor of German and Co-Chair of the Interdisciplinary Program in Cinema Studies at the University of Tennessee Knoxville. Her publications include
three monographs entitled Ghetto Voices in Contemporary German Cultures (2012), Awkward Politics: The Technologies of Popfeminist Activism (with Carrie Smith, 2016), and Precarious Intimacies: The Politics of Touch in Contemporary European Cinema (with Beverly Weber, 2020). She has also published various book chapters, and articles in the fields of German, Media, Film, and Gender Studies. Her new book project is entitled Plants, Places, and Power: Towards Social and Environmental Justice in Contemporary German Literature and Film.

Notes

1. This collective consists of Chris Hanssmann, Lily Irani, Leslie Quintanilla, Saiba Varma, Kalindi Vora, and Salvador Zárate.


3. The organizing work of activists from colonized African nations, employed as language teachers at German universities pre-World War I, can be read as an early example of this kind of the undercommons, where “one can only sneak into the university and steal what one can” (Moten/Harney, 2004, 101). See Reed-Anderson 2000.


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Agence France-Press, “Workers return to Bangladesh’s garment factories despite record Covid deaths,” August 4, 2021


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