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Kavita Sundaram
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Radical Moves: Negotiating Community and Transformation
with (some of) SIT/South Africa's Students of Color

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Abstract

Finding its foundations in inquiries of community, knowledge(s), relational truths, and radical transformation, this project wonders specifically how students of color from the School of International Training (SIT)/South Africa: Multiculturalism and Human Rights Spring 2019 semester abroad in Cape Town experience, negotiate with, and envision the potential futures of community/ies in and around the program. My research operates within a socioprogrammatic context which is highly racialized, seeking to listen to, document, and place in conversation the perspectives of our students of color. My meditations ground themselves in the individual and collective narrative(s) of our students of color, explored primarily in a one-on-one interview and affinity focus group meeting. Themes and questions from these narratives (and their interconnections) are materialized in a multi-medium zine (informal magazine), alongside this report which additionally examines my own research processes in a practice of self-reflexivity. I intend to situate this research within critical inquiries about the future(s) of racialized community/ies in this program, in the lives of project contributors and myself, and in worlds at large.

KEY WORDS: race, whiteness, neoliberalism, racial affinity, community, knowledge, narratives, creative research methods, future

Acknowledgements

This project has been radically transformative to my thought and praxis, and for this process I am incredibly humbled. For facilitating this opportunity to engage in intensive independent inquiry, I want to thank the School of International Training (SIT) – and particularly to SIT/South Africa: Multiculturalism and Human Rights Spring 2019 for allowing me to wonder about this space. I offer my specific appreciation to Stewart Chirova for his steady commitment to our safety and learning, to Emma Arogundade for her guidance on complex pathways of questioning, and to Tabisa Dyonase for her daily and intentional warmth. I am thankful these three organizers as they have lead spaces together which encourage self- and collective-challenge.

I am indebted in more ways than one to Diana. She has, through this process, offered openness, support, validation, and silliness – alongside immense and incomparable creative work on the zine. I have learned with her a way of practicing accountability which becomes both self- and relational-care. She has reminded me how unstructured communication and community are wonderful, radical, and critical.

This project has illuminated, for me, a deep appreciation in my friendship with Lauren. She has – while navigating her own research inquiries this past month – invested herself in creating physical and mental space within our complex home environment for me to create. She has supported me in accessing both material and ideological resources as I have done this reflective work, and I

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am appreciative for the ways she has refused to let me undermine or devalue this work.

I hold a deep and unwavering gratitude to Ayesha Sharma for their engagement, support, and guidance. They have continuously created space through conversation for excitement, reflection, and complexity in necessary and beautiful ways. I am truly thankful for our connections – which themselves have spanned program experiences, learnings on whiteness, artistic and creative processes. Our communications find space in this report, as they were foundational to processes of inquiry for this project.

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Introduction

To begin, I want to thank you for opening this piece of work. I hope that you find what you came here looking for, and maybe pick up some things along the way you don't know you needed or wanted – that, for me, has been the journey of this project.

Wherever you are – at a desk, on a train, in a bed – I ask that you take a breath. Breathe in until you can't anymore, until it feels like all the air in the world is sitting in your lungs.

Maybe it always feels like you're holding the whole world inside of you. I know I've reached my fill when I start to feel a kind of wind moving down the inside of my chest – maybe you'll feel something similar, or maybe you won't which is okay too.

Hold in this breath for a moment or two; sitting in that liminal space might be uncomfortable, calming, both, or neither. When you're ready, release all the air you've been keeping in you – along with anything else that you feel needs to go.

My friend and fellow youth worker, Yani, once led a group of us in a breathing exercise much like this one. As we exhaled with our eyes still closed, she explained there is supposedly scientific evidence (whatever that might mean) that people of color don't typically/often take full breaths, due to the physical tolls of intergenerational racialized trauma.

Breathing fully, then, takes intentionality and dedicated space. I don't know what feelings or thoughts this project will bring up for you. I still don't even really know what it brings up for me.

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Holding this uncertainty in mind, I wanted to offer to you one practice – just breathing – that has guided me in the process of working through physically, emotionally, and intellectually stressed experiences and reflections on race. This offering is informed by the beginning of adrienne maree brown’s (2017) text, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, in which she takes readers through a similar process (brown typically uses lowercase lettering for her name, an act which I respect in this paper through using the same).

I invite you to take or leave this practice of breathing, or find one that works better for you.

Origins and Directions

I offer this project as a personal, collaborative, sociological, and artistic exploration into how students of color from study abroad program SIT/South Africa: Multiculturalism and Human Rights Spring 2019 experience, negotiate, and envision the potential futures of community – with each other, white peers, program coordinators, instructors, homestay families, and so on. I embark on this exploration in Cape Town, South Africa where the program is based. I center this research – intimately and intentionally – around the structurally–informed and powerfully–rebellious narratives of my friends/peers of color, and of myself.

For some context: this program’s student group, unsurprisingly, is largely a white one. Eight students are of color and seventeen students are white, reflecting what I understand to be a long–term raced legacy of the program’s group make–up. This legacy does not exist in a vacuum, instead operating within larger sociohistorical systems of racialized higher education.

For those of us who are folks of color, then, it seems this occupation of de facto white space is not unfamiliar; in particular, many of us attend predominantly white colleges and universities in the United States (U.S.). As our classes and learning have progressed this semester thus far, the specifically U.S.–based racialization of our group has, from my perspective, remained foundational to our engagements with each other (as it will for the foreseeable future with this program drawing to a close).

To ground this dynamic in a concrete process, in my own experiences this semester I have noticed what I would consider to be a kind of cycle of call–outs in large group situations. This cycle, as I might describe it, often involves the following: one or two students of color addresses a group–implicated issue (itself often seemingly rooted in U.S. structures of race), a larger conflict arises where the majority of white students either practice defensive tactics or remain silent, and finally we seem to maintain a dominant collective move ‘forward’ – through which these racialized tensions quietly remain. I have personally witnessed and participated in the intense emotional labor expected of and (complexly) taken on by our students of color during and beyond these moments of harm, and believe that this harm and labor continue due to pervasive white neglect. Ayesha – who carefully and beautifully advised me on this project – has supported me through frameworks of racialized neglect; I have included excerpts of our email exchange on the matter below:

Ayesha: ... I have wrestled with the word neglect for some time and have decided to replace it with ‘abuse’ because it is often the instance when someone abuses their power by failing to challenge the dynamics at hand. It seems like this is what happened in your group when white folks weren’t responding to people of color giving labor to them when that wasn’t the responsibility of the
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POC in the first place. The white people, in this case, are abusing the people of color by allowing them to sit in distress, anger, frustration, whatever they may be feeling – all while they refuse to offer anything.

Me: ... re: white abuse – mmm yes, i really appreciate your thoughts on this process. one thing that comes to mind for me is... [talking about concepts of white resistance to knowledge]... has taught me that in neglect is in fact abuse, and i appreciate how you have deepened that connection and highlighted the violence of giving nothing and taking everything. frankly it's exhausting.
(Personal communication, April 2019)

They have reminded me here that white silence is in fact neglect, refusal, exploitation, and abuse; allowing oppression and harm to continue is an act of violence.

In the wake of our racialized dynamic, then, I ask how our students of color have continued to negotiate with the processes of building and maintaining community. Informed by these narratives of negotiation, I wonder further how students of color envision, theorize, and imagine the various potential futures of this/these community/ies. Within these larger inquiries, I investigate unique individual and collective experiences with the program this semester, seeking to co–create a platform for critical affinity debriefing. I seek ultimately to imagine with others the potential futures of raced community/ies in and beyond this SIT program. The material products of this research are a) a collaborative multi–media zine which combines visual and literary mediums to explore the concepts, themes, questions, and complexities on community which arise in student narrative–sharing, and b) a relevant report which meditates on these topics, the research and creation process, and the content of the zine. First though, this report begins with recognition and interpretation for those scholars who have informed my directions and inquiries.

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A Collection of and Conversation on Literature

My work on this project finds its theoretical and practical footing in a framework of scholarship on social systems and how to re–imagine them. This review of literature and resources begins with a reflection on functions of whiteness and neoliberal social spaces to serve as (some) wider background for the social environment of the program group. What follows is an investigation into concepts of transformation, futurity, and radical community–building – seeking tools to imagine the potential futures of this program. Finally, I bring together works on anti–oppressive and creative research processes, attempting to create a guide from which I might maintain this project’s commitments to social rebellion and revolution in its very practices and products.

(white) Like Me

I find it necessary – entering into the world of this project – to draw on the robust collection of intellectual and emotional work on how hierarchical structures of raced power operate in social venues. I want to offer that it is initially helpful here to move beyond conceptualizations of whiteness which are reduced to concrete markers such as skin color – alongside conceptualizations of racism which are relegated to loud, individual bigotry. Offering an alternative to frameworks of static personal identity, Frankenberg theorizes whiteness as location and standpoint of race privilege – a structurally–informed “place from which White people look at [them]selves, at others, and at society” (1993, 1; as cited in DiAngelo 2011). Theorists have used whiteness to describe a unity of various locations, processes, and practices linked to shifting relations of racial domination (Frankenberg 1993, Fine 1997, Dyer 1997, Sleeter 1993, Van Dijk

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1993; as cited in DiAngelo 2011). Systems of racism change in character across time and space, and so too does whiteness as it adapts and shapes itself to maintain structural power (Desmond and Emirbayer 2009).

White neoliberalism becomes a powerful example of the adaptability of whiteness across sociostructural landscapes – one which I maintain as crucial to examine in the contexts of predominantly white higher education under which this program resides. My definitions of white (neo)liberalism in this project find their grounding in Steve Biko’s (2002) theorizations on this ideological sphere. Examining attitudes amongst white anti-apartheid activists, Biko (2002) offers that white liberals, leftists, and/or radicals perform in ways to distance themselves from structures of racism, as they attempt to establish their right to collaborate in fights for racial justice. These investments in collaboration materialize in white liberal attitudes toward (and prioritization of) fabricated racial integration; artificial ‘coalitional’ spaces created and governed by white people find home in the (neo)liberal sphere, as they serve to maintain façade rather than foster action and change. Framing integration and racial diversity as means toward racial justice rather than as products of this justice, then, white liberalism centralizes its efforts around creating interracial spaces before committing to any true radical transformation of the society these spaces operate within (Biko 2002). Liberal white folks thus maintain hierarchies of racial power, as they continue to participate in a relational system of collusion with structures of whiteness and white supremacy. Biko (2002) identifies in particular this balancing act of self-interest white liberals pursue as they perform a kind of racial consciousness in their integrated spaces, while they maintain their access to and social

comfortability within white spaces; we find here a pattern of neglect toward intra-communal white work, and a refusal to participate in practices of racial self-excavation.

Examining values and practices of knowledge production might foster a deeper understanding into white neoliberal approaches toward ‘anti-racism.’ Utilizing adult developmental theory to deepen understandings of social justice practice in educational contexts, Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2017) outline four ways of knowing in adulthood which shape ideological orientations to justice work. I owe my knowledge of and theorizations on this scholarship to my professor and advisor, Derron Wallace, who originally drew a connection for me between two ways of knowing – instrumental and socializing – and white neoliberal attitudes. To explain – as Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2017) offer, instrumental knowers orient strongly toward concrete advice, rewards, and the ‘right’ way of performing; based largely in individualistic and transactional practices, instrumental knowledge asks: ‘what can I do?’ Socializing knowers, alternatively, orient strongly toward the opinions of others; seeking mainly external approval, socializing knowledge asks: ‘how should it be done?’ (Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano 2017). Operating together in an attempt to practice racial justice, these ways of knowing I find often manifest in certain lines of questioning: ‘how do I be a good white person?’ ‘how do I take up less space?’ ‘how do I be a good (white) ally?’ These questions – and the orientations which underlie them – seem to operate at the foundations of neoliberal educational spaces which do a really good job of cultivating whites and white-adjacent people of color (who have access to white privilege and/or

white spaces) who are/are taught to be/teach each other to be more invested in performing ‘good whiteness’ than actually doing anti-racist work – whatever that work might mean.

These racialized performances of ‘wokeness’ (I use this piece of Black or African–American Vernacular English (AAVE) with intention to note its appropriation by white and non–Black neoliberal spaces) and socially–sanctioned authenticity function to mask and maintain racial hierarchies and hegemony in neoliberal spaces. Wallace’s (2018) theory of ‘white exceptionalism’ offers insight into one pattern of performance in these settings; the concept itself describes claims of difference advanced by white–presenting individuals in order to distance themselves from the white majority, based on particular characteristics of their experience (eg: where they’ve studied, language(s) they speak, marginalized identities they hold, their class status, etc). The operations of white exceptionalism point to the heterogeneity of whiteness, and how even ‘nice’ or ‘cultured’ white folks work to maintain white supremacy through neoliberal pathways.

One way I see neoliberal white folks uphold white supremacy in conversations around race/racisms is through expressions of white fragility – a state of racial instability, where “even a minimum of racial stress becomes intolerable” (DiAngelo 2011, 54). This state particularly involves reactionary and targeted defensive social moves – such as displaying anger, fear, or guilt, through behaviors of argument, silence, or removing oneself from the supposedly stressful situation (DiAngelo 2011). These attitudes and behaviors function to maintain a kind of “white racial equilibrium” where racial domination continues

largely unaddressed (DiAngelo 2011, 54). White fragility holds a “political purchasing power” to effectively consume multiculturalism, offering liberal responses (such as superficial recognition) to more radical justice-seeking actions (Wallace 2016). White fragility often accepts racial diversity so long as diverse spaces name but do not displace white privilege. White fragility prioritizes the comfort, validation, and power of those privileged by racial domination, at the expense of racially-minoritized peoples (Wallace 2016). These attitudes and behaviors stabilize neoliberal environments in which white folks determine and control conversations (or the lack thereof) on white privilege, exploiting the intellectual and emotional labor of folks of color. White fragility is linked to an epistemology of ignorance, a sociohistorical pattern of white resistance to knowledge which works to preserve power and authority, while stifling white investment in racial and social justice (Mills 1997).

Beyond (this)

It is here we might move from analyses of our current social structures and ask – what lies on the other side? brown describes continued negotiations with the raced realities of our worlds as she asserts: “[t]his can’t be all” (2017, 14). She identifies the unsustainability of our hierarchical systems of power and relations of violence, asserting (or maybe longing for) a setting where our purpose moves beyond “formal and informal wars against each other’s bodies” (brown 2017, 14). brown calls our attention to processes of creating and entering into the future, centering her focus on initial processes of vision and conceptualization; “[w]e are in an imagination battle,” she shares (brown 2017, 15). It is, then, systemic imaginations that facilitate opportunities for racialized

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violence, for assimilationist internalized racism, for raced criminalization, for borders, and for race as an organizer of value (brown 2017). brown names her feelings of existence in this ideological system, responding with a commitment to cultivating alternative ideologies for transformation: “I often feel I am trapped inside someone else’s imagination, and I must engage in my own imagination in order to break free” (2017, 15). Though offering focus on her own visions, brown (2017) asserts the importance of collective and collaborative ideation – of seeking out the ideas that will liberate all of us. As she reflects on ways we have been taught to reject practices of self and collective transformation, brown (2017) highlights our learned investments in what is already possible, as we are taught to “leave the impossible alone” (2017, 32). Continuing these meditations on (im)possibility, brown (2017) asks how we make radical moves toward collaboration – if collective imagination is, in fact, how we will survive. She thus offers emergent strategies – strategies of critical and radical connection – which “let us practice, in every possible way, the world we want to see” (2017, 18).

Tracing legacies from pasts, through presents, to futures, Shotwell (2016) also investigates the importance of reckoning with the complications of our world, rather than simply rejecting them. As she begins an exploration into radical social transformation, Shotwell (2016) addresses the pervasive legacies and perpetuation of oppressive systems, asking critically how we might in fact create new communities and worlds when these systems are all we have experienced. Reminding me to return then to the source(s) of our current social structures, Shotwell (2016) maintains that ideologies and practices of normativity – which effectively collapse complexity into categorical binaries – operate in the

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foundations of these systems that we know all too well. Alternatively, then, it seems a new plan is needed which reflects our complicated selves. Shotwell's offering of "open normativities" is one which I find to be a supportive framework in my own conceptions of community's future in this project; these normativities, she explains, prioritize "flourishing" in response to our current dominant systems (2016, 155). This "flourishing" itself describes a complicated, ever-evolving, collaborative normal which effectively decides that "something *deserves a future*" and "*deserves to continue*—" and further decides that these claims themselves are actually normal (Shotwell 2016, 155). Shotwell (2016) suggests that our problem is not simply that we have norms, but rather that these norms do not operate to hold all of the complexities of our world (which makes sense given that holding complexity is not what these established norms were ever meant to do). She thus calls for moves to shift these norms we have such that they allow for and encourage complication (Shotwell 2016).

It becomes apparent, then, that the futurity to which I speak of in this project is not relegated to what I understand dominant, normative, white understandings of future to be – of simply 'that which will happen' in time. My understandings are informed instead by scholarship which grounds imaginations of the future in the reality of the now; Lombardo (2010) offers that an awareness of future – heightened future consciousness – requires a deeper comprehension of the contemporary world(s) we inhabit. Conceptualizing future then requires a dynamic framework of our current world(s), seeing reality itself as transformative and evolving (Lombardo 2010). Lombardo (2010) offers three modes of future to explore: the plausible/practical (what likely will happen), the possible (what

could happen), and the preferable (what do we want to happen); however, I want to offer that some Black feminist concepts of future make a critical intervention into these frameworks – of seeking the future that is necessary. This intervention can be found in Tina Campt’s “grammar of black feminist futurity;” described as “striv[ing] for the tense of possibility that grammarians refer to as the future real conditional or *that which will have **had to** happen,*” the grammar of black feminist futurity “is a performance of a future that hasn’t yet happened but must,” of “living the future *now,*” of “striving for the future you want to see, right now, in the present” (2017, 17). This framework departs from static, temporal notions of future, writing futurity instead as performance of what must happen, now. Campt (2017) points to these concepts of definite–ness and need in theorizing and imagining the future which themselves are grounded in the reality of the now; there is a kind of necessary–ness required, then, as we pursue change and transformation.

Knowing (you/me)

With research projects on transformation, I find that methods of wonder, documentation, and interpretation themselves must work to reflect the radical visions of the world they/we claim to study. Offering art practice as a form of critical inquiry, Sullivan (2006) considers how we construct theories of possibility; alternative to methods of research which obey a linear process of examination, searching for what is possible requires interacting, reflexive, and imaginative practices. Moving beyond what is known, then, is a necessary process; “*if you don’t know where you are going, then any road will get you there*” (Sullivan 2006, 19). As he investigates theories of art–based research,

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Sullivan offers both art product and process as enhanced sites of knowledge production which might be positioned to navigate complex realities (Barone 2001, Cahmann 2003; cited in Sullivan 2006). However, Sullivan (2006) notes a kind of silence around the artistic process from the perspective of the artist, calling for foundational theorization on these practices as we develop concepts of art as research. He offers a framework for deepening academic research structures with art, complicating this western binary between ‘research’ and ‘art’ – between ‘thinking’ and ‘feeling’ – in order to create new opportunities to “see beyond what is known” (Sullivan 2006, 32).

Complicating further these concepts of knowing, and interrogating the white colonial patriarchal norms around theory and language, Trinh (1989) considers the complexities of personal, relational, and communal knowledge production. She addresses in particular the terrain of theory which has long sought to marginalize, explaining her own (or others’) responsive investments in naming as a process of “render[ing] visible what [has been] carefully kept invisible” (Trinh 1989, 48). Simultaneously, though, she seems to question the meaning(s) of her own interest in these explorations as she asks: “what do I want wanting to *know* you or me?” – a question I find I ask myself continually during the process of this intimately narrative-based research (Trinh 1989, 76). As she considers widespread investments in ‘truth,’ Trinh (1989) reflects on dominant attitudes toward knowledge creation which equate imagination with falsification. She invokes storytelling practices, writing that “literature and history once were/still are stories,” and thus seems to offer that the ideological space of the story can be true whilst still “stand[ing] outside the hierarchical realm of facts”

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(Trinh 1989, 121). She complicates for me this binary between subjectivity and objectivity often invoked (in my experience) in response to the stories and experiences of marginalized people. Trinh (1989) additionally complicates established distinctions – between me and you, us and them, I and we – a complication which I find relevant to frameworks of individual and collective truth(s). As I consider my attempts in this project to seek out, listen to, and interpret narrative(s), I reflect on the complexities of dichotomously categorizing and distinguishing individual and collective stories, and of negotiating where my own stories fit in – “you may stay on the other side of the hill once in a while, but you may also be me, while remaining what you are and what i am not” (Trinh 1989, 90). She offers this assertion that narrative can be truth, that maybe the point is not for me to know these truths when they come from others, and further that these truths that come from others also in some ways come from me.

Attempting to stand within these complexities of truth, narrative, and relation, I turn to creative conceptions of research practice. As she describes art-based research in particular, Kara (2015) identifies a core element of art that seems overwhelmingly neglected in traditional research fields – the multiplicity of truth. In widespread social science research, she explains, ‘truth’ has long been regarded as a replicable finding – a “single, shareable and indisputable viewpoint” (Kara 2015, 6). Alternatively, then, she offers realms of art as more readily able to recognize the subjectivity of truth(s); “the ‘truth’ in artwork is not necessarily experienced in the same way by everyone, so this formulation presents ‘truth’ as multiple and contestable” (Kara 2015, 6). This process of placing in conversation multiple truths is one necessary for creativity; theorists

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have offered creativity itself as a process of finding new development from existing elements (Kara 2015). Creativity, then, might allow space for (re)creation, collaboration, and community; “[i]t’s not about making something from nothing; it’s about taking things that that already exist and making new combinations” (Kara 2015, 12).

These frameworks of creativity, as I read them, demand processes of creation which themselves require a kind of anti-hierarchical collectivity, and thus some commitment to critical self-reflection. As she examines Gayatri Spivak’s meditations on western research representations of third world peoples, Kapoor (2004) analyzes Spivak’s texts on a practice of hyper-self-reflexivity. Identifying the necessary reflection on one’s own position within the wider social context, Kapoor (2004) notes Spivak’s calls for the west to enter into a heightened commitment to this reflexivity, particularly in research arenas centered around the third world ‘other.’ Kapoor synthesizes Spivak’s suggestions for beginning to develop an ethical relationship with the subaltern, specifically noting a process of working “without guarantees,” which I found particularly helpful in my own considerations of consent and agency in this project (2004, 640). Kapoor (2004) speaks here in particular to instances of subaltern silence or refusal; she reads these instances – which often hold ascriptions of research ‘failure’ – alternatively as practices of resistance and agency. Kapoor ultimately grounds these readings in Spivak’s critical wider recognition of the subaltern as “not only... heterogeneous,” but “irretrievably heterogenous” (1988a, 284; cited on Kapoor 2004, 640). As Kapoor seems to offer, our (read: western-based researchers’) investments in amicably researching the subaltern, in getting

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personal yet intimately generalizable answers from marginalized peoples, are ultimately futile and harmful – these investments, themselves, function as attempts to assign a single narrative to a complex group and/or identity of peoples. She explains, then, that we must learn to be open to the limitations of our own knowledge systems, and – practically – the limitations of our (career) research interests. There are, inherently, complications with the western researcher/native participant; as she considers her own critiques of Spivak’s work, Kapoor (2004) notes Spivak’s vested interest in intimate, one-to-one connections between the west and the subaltern as a pathway to an ethical relationship between the two. In response, Kapoor identifies a gap in inquiry between these individual relationships and the pervasive and systemic relationships between institutional structures: “How does a personalised and micrological approach translate into institutional or macrological politics... Is an intimate relationship with the subaltern even compatible with institutional processes, let alone on a large scale?” (2004, 643). I do not have answers to these questions – nor do I think answers are what I must be searching for.

Where Do We Go (from here)

These pieces, for me, offer critical dimensions from which to view whiteness, exertion of power, relationality, community, stories, and truth – both as these things operate in our current context, and as they could in our future ones. An examination into white neoliberal governance yields a requirement to address the limitations of our systems of binary thought when doing and conceptualizing collective futures and nows, asking for the potential of more complicated knowledge production(s) which reflect the wants, needs, and

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realities of our peoples. I am thus left invested in tending, through my project, to the possibilities of pushing (racialized) boundaries, particularly in regards to my/our conceptualizations of narrative, community, and beyond. I intend to situate my research within conversations (both in and outside the academy) about these conceptualizations and their racializations.

On (intimate) Methods

This project finds its interest of seeking individual and collective narrative in recognition of storytelling as a potentially rebellious act against concepts of truth established by systems which privilege whiteness, cisgender-ness, and coloniality. My recognitions hold their grounding in Trinh's (1989) theorizations of stories and narratives as true, and yet always complicating ideas of an objective, dominating truth.

A few weeks ago, I reached out to all students of color on the program this semester electronically in our Whatsapp group chat, detailing the project's elements and goals. I offered some personal context about where I was coming from for this project – in particular, my noticings of group dynamics and of moments where emotional and intellectual labor had been placed on students of color to educate, lead conversations, call out, etc. I explained that in light of these situations, I have been interested in using the time and energy for this project to focus on the experiences and perspectives of folks in that group chat, specifically around being in community in various ways and with various peoples this semester. I shared my feelings that the narratives of folks in that group have been taken in really complicated ways within the larger student group, and thus that I was/am hoping this project might be one place dedicated to hearing and engaging with these narratives. I opened myself up for communication – either in the group chat or in a direct message with myself – around project interest/questioning/critique (asking for more information, participating, and/or offering thoughts/feedback), as well as around my own intentions, hopes, and directions. I offered participation/contribution options of one-on-one

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conversations/interviews with myself, small group meetings, and/or a large group meeting/focus group (drawing a connection to an affinity group we had participated in earlier this semester – which itself actually facilitated the creation of this group chat). After explaining these options, I additionally shared my willingness to hearing other ideas of how to connect, and my respect for folks who were/are not interested in contributing. Lastly, I outlined the zine as a creative element of this project. Describing the piece as a multi-media informal magazine which intends to explore larger themes/questions that arise out of project conversations, I offered another option for participation as contribution to the zine in some way (through submissions such as writing, drawings, pictures, song lyrics, quotes, etc. or through organization such as editing, layout, brainstorming, etc.) Finally, I thanked them for their time and energy in reading and consideration. Responses from folks in the group included interest, appreciation, and silence. To those who communicated interest, I confirmed if it would be okay for me to reach out to them personally to discuss the project more, answer questions, ask questions, and be in conversation about needs.

The purpose of the one-on-one conversations, in my mind, was to explore folks' unique and personal narratives regarding how they've experienced various communities within the program, as well as their thoughts and theories around how these communities might be imagined in the future. I had one interview with a friend over Skype per their ask – we were both in our respective bedrooms as we spoke. Here, I want to offer some reflections on my own engagements in this conversation:

I entered this interview with some guiding questions and topics, though we departed from them as needed. After checking in on a personal level about how we were both doing, I asked about their decision to participate in this study, and more specifically in the one-on-one interview; meditations on this question also included a conversation around this person's goals, hopes, and expectations for this project. In a journal entry prior to this interview, I note my interest in this initial conversation:

*I'm looking @ my guiding interview questions now, wondering if they allow for all they need to. I think I need to take that first question really seriously
→ their hopes/expectations** ~~need to be centered~~ I need to center*

As we went on, I asked about their thoughts on the program and the group dynamic. I asked them to offer a few words which they associate with their relationships to their host families, to our program coordinators, to white students, and to other students of color. I asked them with whom on this program they've felt most vs. least comfortable with, and about a relationship they've made so far this semester that they are grateful for. I came to these questions with interest in searching, with my peer, for landscapes of their current realities in and around this program – informed by Lombardo's (2010) urges to ground awareness(es) of the future in an evolving conceptualization of contemporary moments. I also inquired about what community means to this student, and what they feel it has meant in the context of the program. I asked this question as I have learned to regard definitions/meanings as bridges between past and future – built through both the state of past experiences, and the hope/expectation of future ones. Invoking the space of the program, I intended to offer one way through which to draw connections between these meanings of community and

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the ongoing present. Looking toward futures and potential transformations, I asked what they think needs to change about this program, a question built in my meditations on Camp's (2017) visions of a needed and necessary future. I asked, too, about what they would change (if anything) about their relationships to their host families, to our program coordinators, to white students, and to other students of color. Brown (2017) guides my investments in these questions in envisioning the future of community; my intentions were to create space in our conversation where my peer might share how they themselves engage their own imagination. To come to a close, I summarized my rememberings of the interview via my own notes, and checked in with this student about their feelings on the content, my intended usages of this content, and anything they might want to add or ask. Though our interview ended here, the two of us established an openness to continuing these conversations more informally as we move forward.

The group meeting – intending to recognize the power of affinity spaces – attempted to listen not only to the perspectives of the collective, but particularly to the intra-group communication and interpretation of these perspectives away from white eyes and ears. Four students – one of which did the personal interview with me – participated in this focus group. All of these students lived together at the time, so per their suggestion, the meeting took place in their living room. I will offer some reflections on my engagements in this meeting:

A quick note about this focus group: though I entered the space with guiding questions (as I did for the interview), the conversations had in that room seemed to take on lives of their own – here, I wonder if my questions operated more as small offerings of direction rather than as organizing agents (from my
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own limited standpoint). My questions for this focus group often mirrored my questions for the interview in content and purpose. After checking in with the group about how we are (generally and with our respective projects), I presented an initial question which asked about folks' decisions to participate in this study, and more specifically in this group meeting. I followed this inquiry up with one on their hopes for the group meeting and for the project at large. After this initial conversation, I offered general questions regarding their experiences and reflections on the program – and the group dynamic – thus far this semester. I later asked for some reflections on experiences with host families and interactions with program coordinators. Interested in discussing folks' relationships with white students as a group, I intended to ask about experiences in program discussions with the whole group; however, this topic arose itself through the conversational direction of my peers in that space. After we discussed our feelings about these big group discussions, I asked about how it has felt being in organized POC-only student spaces this semester – whether that be the affinity group meeting a few months ago, this group meeting, etc. This question came from my own personal witnessing of (often white) rhetoric around POC spaces which either dismisses them as unnecessary, or labels them 'important' without consideration toward how their importance comes from the discomfort and harm of white-dominant spaces. Here, I also asked folks what they think that students of color have brought to the program/the group this semester; I find our program group has predominantly superficially 'thanked' students of color for their contributions rather than tended to the depth of these contributions, and though I think it's a fair assertion to make that white folks need to be doing that work of

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tending, I also wonder if this work to recognize and appreciate POC labor can be a radical act of self-love. Informed still by brown's (2017) work on transformative visions, my last questions remained the same from my interview; as I asked the group about their definitions/conceptualizations of community – particularly in the context of this program – I owe credit and gratitude to brown's (2017) theories of collective ideation and imagination.

These practices of collaborative vision become relevant, too, in the processes through which this project's zine came to fruition. My commitments to developing the zine come from a belief (or maybe an understanding) that a multi-medium, creative product would be better positioned to navigate the complex realities and futures with which this project and its contributors deal. Sullivan shares that "*if you don't know where you are going, then any road will get you there;*" I decided that a zine would allow me space to really try and explore *any* road necessary, in a way that might also allow me to combine and complicate thinking and feeling in one dynamic process (2006, 19). This mode of expression, for me, has also been acutely aligned with this project's investigations of truths, stories, and narratives. Kara (2015) discusses art as a space in which 'truth' is subjective and multiple, noting how artistic processes might complicate traditional research values of objectivity; as this project stands at the intersections of multiple truths, I find the foundation of zine-making in collaging material – in piecing together conversations – to be one which holds a critical nod toward radical creativity.

Co-creation of the zine did not follow a fixed structure, organizing itself mainly around interest, availability, need, etc. When initially connecting with
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folks over participation in the project, two of my friends/peers communicated interest in contributing to the zine in some way (one through submission, one through support in formatting/organization). Diana and I met at the SIT office a couple of weeks ago; as (some) white students held their recently-planned, recurring white affinity meeting outside on the patio, the two of us sat in one of the small classrooms to discuss potential layouts for the zine. Though initially discussing useful material/software, our conversation soon centered itself around the content and explorations of the zine itself. Here, informed by reflections on the focus group meeting, we began to pull together sources, questions, jokes, and orientations from this semester, and created potential visions for the content, audience, and purpose for the zine.

The following day, I reached out to a dear friend, artist, and phenomenal U.S.-based youth worker – Dee – in search of guidance (as Dee’s own art practice has involved zine-making). We discussed the importance of flow (structure or lack thereof), attitude, visualization, and collaboration. As I wrestled with the simultaneous satirical and serious nature of the ideas Diana and I were pursuing, Dee reminded me that intention, importance, and play are not necessarily divorced from each other – that I/we might find them all in the creation of this piece.

Later in the week, I met with Diana at a coffeeshop in Observatory to develop a more robust outline for the zine. Our friend, peer, and Diana’s housemate – Uju – joined this conversation. Shifting back and forth between discussing particular details (‘what’s one question that should go at the top of this page?’ ‘we could dye the paper with tea – you remember doing that?’), larger

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thematic visualizations ('there needs to be a part on self-care' 'how can we show feelings of isolation?'), and the personal goings-on in our lives, we outlined sections and traced connections between parts and the whole of the zine. We specifically and intentionally discussed where more individual contributions from folks might come in (using each other's handwriting, framing pages around submissions vs. incorporating submissions into existing spaces, offering specific questions or quotes from us). Pulling together materials from objects I brought with me from home, supplies a friend hadn't used for their project, and things found at a local Crazy Store, the bulk of hands-on zine creation happened at the (largely empty) SIT classroom – where Diana and Uju were both also working. The remaining pages of the zine were finished by me at the Cape Town Central Library and at my home's kitchen table – with some electronic support from Diana.

The limitations (or maybe rather unexpected challenges) of this project reach far and are many. Those that initially come to mind are ones rooted in space, time, and access – this work was largely done in under a month's time, access to material resources has been stunted by cost, and my contributors were simultaneously balancing their own research. There have been complexities due to my unfamiliarity with the space I occupy – in finding accessible and comfortable work spaces, in taking time to learn where to find which resources, in negotiating requirements to travel. The one that is central in my reflections now is this project's due date – as nothing about this work feels complete, though I don't know that it ever would. I have been learning to appreciate, however, the ways these 'limitations' have pushed and challenged my comfort and knowledge.

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I Am Not (entitled to) Everything: Reflections

Shifting here to discuss the processes through which I navigated my engagements with this project's participants/contributors, I find it critical to first offer some reflections on my own racialization, and how my participation in a system of racial domination has informed my decisions with this project.

I move through U.S. social systems as a light-skinned, mixed (white and South Asian), racially ambiguous, non-Black person of color. I choose these words and their prominence as I write here carefully and within intention, as I have come to consider the processes through which I have been racialized to be primary organizers in my American life. My reasoning for this consideration – though it all continuously shifts and changes – finds its footing in the operation of the U.S. first and foremost as a settler colonial nation-state. Interrogating feminisms' engagements with racisms, bell hooks (1981) explains how the U.S. was colonized on the basis of racial imperialism, with racist allegiances taking precedence over those of gender. These foundations remain endemic to the U.S. today; I find a ringing truth in her assertion that “American society is one in which racial imperialism supersedes sexual [or rather gendered] imperialism” (bell hooks 1981, 122). While I experience some forms of racial oppression, my position within the U.S. racial hierarchy is one of immense racial privilege compared to many of my siblings of color, due to my multi-layered proximity to whiteness (my Euro-aligned physical features, family's economic mobility, private white/Euro-centric education, and childhood housing in predominantly middle class white and Asian suburbs are some modes of proximity that come to mind).

Working through the ways my racialization has shaped this project has occurred as a continuous process. As I initially embarked on this research, I found myself thinking primarily about how my academic orientations hold their grounding in neoliberal frameworks of education and learning. Informed by Drago-Severson and Blum-

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DeStefano's (2017) theorizations on instrumental and socializing knowledge production, I see this question of 'how do I be a good white person/ally?' find its way into western white colonial approaches to researching racially-marginalized peoples – effectively becoming 'how do I be a good white researcher?' I would consider these orientations to be ones which dominate the white 'social justice' academic spheres out of which my initial reflections on research ethics arise. As I move further into my own ethical reflexivity, then, I find importance in pushing and challenging my own ways of knowing, particularly ones which occupy white epistemological spaces. I wonder about the potential for reframing these questions around race, racisms, and ethics; I could ask instead: 'what is my relationship to white supremacy and racial domination?' 'how does this relationship shape my navigation of and engagement in spaces, particularly research ones?' 'how can I shift my attitudes and behaviors (research and beyond) to divest from whiteness?' To follow then, I want to explain some of the ways I have attempted to explore these questions in my research process.

Internal and External Shifts

In one of our initial email exchanges, Ayesha offered the following lens through which to reflect on my orientations in this project:

One initial thought I have is, how are you nuancing your position deeper than a community member? What is your relationship to your community other than being another person of color? How does your positioning differ? (Personal communication, April 2019).

Below is an excerpt from a journal entry in which I meditated on these questions, prior to meetings with this project's participants/contributors:

(position) within the student group
access to white spaces and privilege → whiteness+ south asian-ness+affluency
out trans/non-binary person
\$ U.S. upper middle class - immigrant economic/social mobility, assimilationism

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→ who do I align myself with @ SIT & when/why/how? → friends, class, group discussions

how do these positions inform my comfort w/ calling out things?

do I only call things out when I know there's other people around to support me (or maybe to take the brunt of the response?)

what am I giving/taking?

what am I willing to sacrifice in this process? → what role does accountability play in community?

(position) within SIT

me (as an american + a student)//us (as americans/students) vs. program staff

→ who has 'the' power? who has what kind of power?

→ who do we (as students) exert power over? who has power over us?

→ how do we/I exert power over others?

who creates the community of the student group? who has the power to transform that community? whose responsibility is it to do so?

Here, I see myself searching for a deeper and more nuanced understanding around my participation in power relations. These dynamics – between myself and my peers, between other students, between myself/students and program staff – cannot be simplified into a framework which places one person or one group at the top of a hierarchy, and one at the bottom. Alternatively, it becomes my own responsibility to consider when and where I hold power over others, and what I am doing to mitigate that power. I find that this excerpt also gives context for a question of impact I have wrestled with since the very beginnings of my research: what does this project need to do? This question, for me, operates both internally (what practices/approaches do I need to take within this research?) and externally (where do the processes/products of this research need to go?).

This question of 'what do I need to do' becomes somewhat more direct/concrete in my choices surrounding my participation in project meetings and collaborations with my peers. The journal excerpt I offer below is one I wrote

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a few days before my interview conversation, and one which I used to go into this conversation with intention:

where does whiteness show up in my interview approach?

→ *excessive pre-planning/wanting things to go a certain way (present in many relationships/connections)*

→ *you need to go with the flow!!*

→ *I can't be all talk, saying I'm down with anything & then getting frustrated when things aren't as I 'planned'*

→ *need to shift my frustrations from the source of fluidity toward the limiting structures themselves (why am I out here getting annoyed at slowness when the problem is really that the world moves too fast)*

→ *the problem isn't the unplannedness//the problem is the structure that doesn't allow for fluidity***

I can't stop at shifting my frustration, though. what am I going to do about it?

Reflecting on this excerpt, for me, brings up my own investments in temporal/structural rigidity – an investment (I think) I largely learned growing up in/being told to assimilate into a white capitalist western space. I wrote this entry in a state of stress largely of my own making, after having just put together a guiding schedule/to-do list for this project; I noticed myself growing overwhelmed by little things at the time, that themselves were mainly complicated due to the structures/requirements of this project (enforced either by an SIT grading rubric or by my own informal rules). I reflect here not necessarily to invalidate my feelings of frustration, but rather to discuss my process of navigating one of their sources.

Kapoor's (2004) analysis of Spivak's suggestion to work without guarantees has supported me in my own attempts to divest myself of a need for rigid structure in this project. Their theorizations create space for me to recognize how these investments try to place limitations on the freedom of myself and others – from whom kinds of freedom have already been made systemically complex. This project has thus involved critical moments of learning, for me, in standing fully and confidently at radical sites of fluidity – through research processes and writing alike. As I reflect on this learning, I find that I

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center fluid/adaptable pathways and decisions particularly around participant consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and reciprocity with my peers – pathways which I outline as follows.

Consent (between you/i)

Work around meetings with my peers for this project operated under a continuous and spectrum-based approach to consent, and did not always adhere to traditional institutional methods. This approach has particularly been characterized, in my mind, by opening up longer and repeated conversations around consent in participation rather than one-off, yes/no questions. Informed specifically by the context of this program's group dynamic in which emotional labor has not only been asked but expected of students of color (a phenomenon by no means exclusive to our group), I have intended for my conversations with participants around consent to center 'how' and 'what' questions, occurring before, during, and after each part of the research process. As I developed an informed consent form for my contributors, I tried to create space for changing minds, personal agreements, and varying needs. This form, as I would explain it, tried to outline what participation in this project might/could entail, options for confidentiality and anonymity, and sites of contributor agency. I created distinct releases for one-on-one interviews, the focus group meeting, and zine submissions – all of which were paired with space for added notes on specific agreements between myself and each contributor. At the beginning of both the interview and focus group meeting, I went over the consent forms in conversation with my participating peers. Verbally and written in this form, I shared that given the scope of this research is within the program – and is to be presented to

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program members and instructors – my interests lie only in determining a privacy and anonymity level most comfortable for each participant. I gave a blanket offering to share my recordings and notes from each meeting with those who were present in them, and to run any quotes (and their context) by the quoted person for approval before final submission of this project. We also explored options for each person's confidentiality and anonymity, which ranged from direct quoting and naming to sharing no identifying information; many of the forms thus have notes on these individualized decisions made. These notes were written at varying times before, during, and after meetings as my peers' contemplated, and I've since checked in with a few folks verbally/electronically to discuss any updates. As time as gone on though – and particularly as this project has become increasingly collaborative – limitations of this consent form process have shown up for me. It seemed easy, originally, to put participation options into binary boxes at the beginning of this research process – interview vs. focus group, zine submission vs. not contributing to the zine, personal conversation vs. formal contribution. But when the group meeting simultaneously becomes a venting space, when zine submitters become zine co-creators, when personal conversations become part of project brainstorming – when fluidity is needed – a pre-existing form that requires a static decision through signature becomes incomplete. Alongside the consent forms, then, I have come to respect research consent which comes through ongoing and ever-shifting verbal or electronic conversations, and find that these conversations sometimes have more potential to recognize the continuous– and complex–natures of maintaining consent and comfort.

On my end, with this research largely informed by what I perceive to be a lack of real listening to the narratives and perspectives of students of color, my intention has been specifically and alternatively to listen anywhere I can throughout the research process. Simultaneously though, I have found it critically important for me to commit to an ongoing reflective process regarding my own research theories and practices. I have practiced reflexive journaling to revisit and revise my goals, decisions, questions, and frameworks during and between various elements of the research process, asking how my research interacts with hierarchies of racialized power.

Finally, to address reciprocity. I find this a complex subject to write about as I embody only one perspective in the relationships I discuss here; I'll offer what I think I have given, then, with the caveat that – like much of this project – there are other stories and truths at play. I choose here to explain forms of giving through both specific practices, as well as through more ideological methods. Concretely, then, I have provided food, opened up my living space, travelled to my peers' living space, given project/report guidance, and given support in personal matters. Psychologically/ideologically/socially, in conversation with my participating peers I have come to find mutual mental benefits in holding space for narrative sharing, community around racial affinity, and communal imagining. Additionally (in ways that might transcend those two categories I've outlined), each of this project's contributors will receive an electronic copy of the zine, as will the SIT office. Though my management of time has placed limits on my ability to offer the findings and conclusions of this report to my contributors prior to the project's submission deadline, I intend to share these things with

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them as soon as I've finished, open to questions, critiques, and conversations about my written perspectives.

One site of reciprocity (or potentially lack thereof) I want to discuss here is that involving institutional/structural change. As I entered into this project, I considered this kind of change to be largely impossible; how to take explorations of small-scale narratives into wider structural transformation? I reflect back here on Kapoor's critiques of Spivak, in which she wonders how interpersonal research approaches can translate into shifts of institutional processes – “[i]s an intimate relationship with the subaltern even compatible with institutional processes, let alone on a large scale?” (2004, 643). I bring this question into the discussion on ethics because I find that structural change is one space in which reciprocity moves beyond me – moves beyond this project – and becomes the responsibility of a wider collective whole (this group of SIT students, future groups, program staff, SIT upper administration). As I've met with friends and peers of color over the past few weeks, I have heard from many of them a powerful and recurring need for these narratives and imaginations they share to go somewhere – the future, in particular. I will offer some suggestions that have come up around how exactly to facilitate this movement, but I found it critical to note here that for me, reciprocity in this project looks like creating final products that can be/taken beyond – wherever that beyond might be.

Co-creation (in Color)

It is here that I re-center my energy and thoughts around my findings from this research. I want to begin with a conversation I left off above – on a communicated interest in the labor and explorations of this project moving into spaces beyond that of those who have developed it. Ways to foster this movement find their responsibility in program students, staff coordinators, and higher administration, and might occur at individual, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic levels. Some direct suggestions from my peers who have contributed to this work include required readings (of which this report might be one), active encouragement or organization of affinity meetings (both white and POC), intra-communal white work (eg: checking each other for racist remarks), increased numbers of students of color in the program, and spaces which hear and respond to the needs of these students. In meetings, we have spoken at length about this last suggestion – rooted in a current feeling that the program (which in my mind includes elements determined by the greater SIT organization as well as the collective of the student group) has overlooked and sacrificed POC needs in favor of white needs. This racialized exploitation process operates beyond the world of this program; conversations with my peers for this project have highlighted how many of us have to navigate similar racial dynamics at our colleges and universities back home (Group communication, 2019). My feeling is that predominantly white spaces of western higher education – even neoliberal ones – have been designed to prioritize white learning at their core; within this program, it seems, this prioritization translates to a feeling that white people get to learn within curated/structured educational spaces – while students of color must

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search elsewhere, outside, and beyond these spaces for moments of critical learning (Group communication, 2019). And here, I don't know that the violence of this forced compromise/sacrifice has been adequately or fully held by the collective of this group. Though I won't offer determining arguments as to what changes must or should be made, and cannot within this assignment fully explore possibilities for the future, I do want to discuss here how this project has been a process of holding, appreciating, and fighting for POC-only spaces.

I find it important here to give a brief and candid account of my final weeks working on this project. This research, this semester, and much of my recent academic life have been organized around navigations of neoliberal white racism, and in these past few days I've often asked myself: how do we find space to reflect on experiences of racialized emotional/ideological violence and abuse, when we are always continuously living them? This inquiry, I find, is best described in an excerpt of a recent email I sent Ayesha (some of which I have rephrased for self-protection):

tonight i'm reflecting a lot on how i underestimated the emotional labor this work requires. truthfully it's just hard to reflect on a situation when you're right in the middle of it, if that makes sense. the final parts of this project, i have found, need (and deserve) all my attention, energy, and confidence to do this reflective work – and reflecting on the power of POC community isn't easy when i [am always around] white folks who make me feel like i'm making shit up/creating problems. (Personal communication, April 2019).

How do we find space to reflect, then, when space might feel like a privilege we do not have?

My initial reactions are external in operation; for this student group, I imagine some options to be continuing this work of keeping white folks

accountable, or alternatively to stop and attempt to disengage from the wider group. I am reminded here of some final words Sara Ahmed offers in *On Being*

Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life:

Things might appear fluid if you are going the way things are flowing. When you are not going that way, you experience the flow as solidity, as what you come up against. In turn, those who are not going the way things are flowing are experienced as obstructing the flow.

We might need to be the cause of obstruction. we might need to get in the way if we are to get anywhere. We might need to become the blockage points by pointing out the blockage points. (2012, 186-7).

I want to respond: but what do we do when always being a blockage point is exhausting, frustrating, even traumatizing? I wonder though, if I might reframe my question: where do we find support, fulfillment, and life – if being this obstruction is not where we will find those things? As brown (2017) asks, how we make these transformative moves toward collaboration – if collective imagination is how we will survive?

This project has felt like a practice in seeking this collaboration – in recognizing and loving the power of spaces made by, for, and about people of color. Out of my meetings with folks has come – as I might describe – a feeling that support, accountability, care, and community have come more often from other folks of color than they have from the collective whole. This feeling, I would offer, translates into a strong need for more POC-only spaces that are encouraged and supported by this program. I have begun, myself, to imagine the potential for these spaces particularly in the processes through which my peers and I have co-created this zine. As they continue to outline ways of knowing in adulthood, Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2017) offer the final concept

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self-transforming knowers; yearning for interconnection and co-constructed meaning, self-transforming knowledge prioritizes collaboration and mutually-expansive thinking. From meetings at coffeeshops, to late-night texts about spontaneous ideas, to physically co-writing and piecing together the final product – I have experienced a knowledge production process that has (in my mind) been collaborative, caring, difficult, fun, and radically transformative. The zine, I think, reflects what is powerful about this project's/this program's POC-affinity spaces; it is simultaneously silly and serious, structured and fluid, collective and individual. It spans SIT pasts, presents, and futures of color, and I/we intend for it to operate as a material product in which to find space and community – if/when there isn't always one easily accessible.

Conclusions and Moves Forward

This project has sought out a relational exploration of how this program's students of color have experienced and continued to navigate community in the white neoliberal spaces we occupy; it has further invested itself in these students' visions as to what the potential futures of this community might hold. Through conversations, meetings and creations with my friends and peers, I have found this work to involve organization of and engagement in complex sites of collective support and imagination. In particular, I have been allowed by my friends/allowed myself to participate in ideological and practical artistic/creative collaboration through zine-making. I have found, through the whole of this work, a pattern of complications in practicing kinds of intimate and creative collaboration within institutional academic structures – and specifically identified long-internalized beliefs within myself which contribute to these complications. As this research draws to a (somewhat artificial) close, I stand increasingly confident in the power of and need for POC affinity spaces to offer one venue for collective care amongst folks of color – in and beyond this program. I find it relevant to note, here, that my support of these spaces holds in mind simultaneous, necessary, and full deconstructions of white neoliberal settings as tools of racial domination – deconstructions which hold intra-communal white work at their core.

In this research process, I have begun the work of identifying my academic, research, and relational practices which find their roots in oppressive tendencies, and leave this project with a deepened commitment to understanding how I have operated (and continue to operate) in research and in life from places

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of western coloniality and white supremacy. I have noticed, in particular, my need to divest myself from rigidity and structure, ownership and control, and an enforced hierarchical binary of intra– and extra–academia. Working alongside some of my friends and peers of color this past month, I have reflected on the ways my fields (that of sociology, in particular) seem often center their theorizations around how the world currently works and why. Unsurprisingly, these fields (much like the rest of the academy) also seem to prioritize a research process which is highly individualized. As I leave this project, then, I find a kind of urgency in moving beyond what’s happening now. to imagine the possibilities of the future – and to do this imagination in community. This work, as I am starting to understand it, can and will complicate the structural investments of the academy – complications, I think, are necessary if we are to find a future world in which we might live, thrive, and be free.

From here, I want to offer that future researchers might (to the extent that they can) critique loudly the marginalizing operations of traditional western white research practices, approaches, and orientations. I urge that they/you search alternatively for practices of inquiry (note my shift in language) which center collaboration and collective ideation. It is not enough to critique alone; we must do it standing alongside others. These radical shifts in practice must, in and of themselves, function as part of larger, widespread transformations to academia, which itself has grown out of foundations in racialized hierarchies of power. My final proposal to future researchers is to realize that we must fully implicate ourselves in every one of our pursued inquiries. If we are intent researching an ‘other,’ rather than engaging curiously with a collective in which we find

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ourselves, then maybe we should not be doing research at all. To wonderers and inquirers – who have been told/believe that they are not researchers – I offer my respect and admiration for this everyday work of seeking futures more radical than our presents.

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