

The magic of feminist bridging: A mosaic of anti-racist speech bubbles about Othering in Swedish Academia

By Loving Coalitions Collective

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Abstract

Are feminist coalitions magical enough to survive and endure while questioning and shaking the colonial/racist foundations of Swedish academic knowledge production and the overall Swedish society? Can feminist bridging and collective writing remain a magical process even when grappling with difficult experiences and memories of Othering and racialization? This is a creatively and collectively written article on feminist coalition building, and its importance in thinking, articulating and deconstructing race, racialization and racist structures. More than two years ago, seven interdisciplinary gender studies scholars of mixed ethnic and racial origins, came together to explore our differently situated experiences of disidentifying with Swedish academia and society in a collective we call Loving Coalitions (capital initials). Against the background of Swedish exceptionalism, historical amnesia of Sweden's colonial past and present, and the deafening silence on Swedish whiteness and racism, we are sharing our poems, letters, texts and testimonies of racist interactions in Swedish academia and society. While doing so, we discuss how moving away from conventional ways of doing research and experimenting with creative methodological alternatives allow us to acknowledge and embrace our different life backgrounds and academic trajectories as a mode of knowledge production. We hope and believe that our experiences, reflections and ways to resist racism and Othering in Sweden and Swedish academia through alternative coalition building, based on mutual care and love, can be relevant in a Danish context as well.

KEYWORDS: feminist coalitions, Swedish exceptionalism, racism, Swedish academia, alternative methodologies, everyday experiences, Critical Race Studies

Introduction

We are seven interdisciplinary gender studies scholars of mixed ethnic and racial origins who came together to explore our differently situated experiences of disidentifying with Swedish academia and society in a collective we call Loving Coalitions. After years of working in different gender studies centers/programs in Sweden, we have come to ask ourselves, individually and collectively, on which grounds do we participate in shaping gender studies within Swedish academia? When, where and how have our voices been heard or neglected as irrelevant, not timely, foreign, and not academic enough? Can we belong to this academic timespace called gender studies in Sweden, particularly in the current context of the neoliberalization of universities and the alt-right backlash against gender studies, antiracist and migration research? Can the subaltern speak when she is refused the privilege of being heard or worse, being made unintelligible in the face of epistemic ignorance if not violence? Our aim is not only to speak but to change academic practices, structures, epistemic norms and modes of knowledge production in gender studies.

Drawing on creative ways of producing knowledge, Loving Coalitions has become a space for sharing our memories which are loudly or subtly relevant to feminism(s) as a movement, as a theory, as an institutionalized field of studies and as embodied in daily life. Among those memories, there are many vivid memories of interactions in Swedish academia and society. We have, over time, built trust in this space, while moving away from conventional ways of doing research and experimenting with creative methodological alternatives that have allowed us to compare notes between our different backgrounds and academic trajectories, and collectively understand them in new ways.

In alignment with our creative and collective working modes, the structure of this article does not follow a normative academic paper. We have instead decided to let the reader take a peek into our messy on-going process of collaboration as a collective in which we embrace all the worlds we

embody, i.e., the academic, domestic, creative, geopolitical, natural, affective, corporeal, spiritual, social and political ones by letting them all become parts of our writing and conversations in an emergent, fluid, improvisational and unsynchronized way. Without following a linear narrative, we share reflections on racism, whiteness, Swedish exceptionalism, coloniality of time, migration politics, feminist coalition building, etc.

In accordance with our creative working modes, the article is a mix of collective reflections and individual pieces of text, written as part of the memory sharing in our group. With the exception of longer contemplations on the theme of time, the individual pieces are marked through italicization and first name in parenthesis.

We situate our article within ongoing feminist critiques of Swedish exceptionalism, color-blindness, whiteness and the absence of a discourse on race. We argue that writing from the everyday experience of being the racialized Other can urge us to think, articulate and deconstruct race, racialization and racist structures, which is necessary to decolonize Swedish gender studies and its epistemic culture. Next, we introduce our methods and methodologies as a potential mode of knowledge production about race, racialization and intersectional power structures that delink from the white epistemic academic norms. Moreover, we argue that such modes of knowledge production could be mobilized as a way out of the neoliberal temporalities of academia that is the capitalist colonial temporality of optimizing production and quantification of knowledge. Instead, we offer slow research, community building and care. In other words, with our ongoing project we wish to disrupt the common, fast, competitive and patriarchal research patterns. Instead, we allow for space and time to build mutual trust, slowly and organically, while creating a community in which we can connect and heal while writing together about feminisms. We are also slowly weaving together our discussions, letters, poems, memories, testimonies and stories into a collective book that celebrates the journey of a beautiful coalition of seven different yet interconnected feminist/gender scholars. Our book is going to be called: *Memories*

that Bridge: Weaving Feminist (Her)Stories in Loving Coalition.

We responded to the call for contributions to the special issue about Racialization and Racism in Denmark, even though our focus is Sweden. We took our point of departure in the call for papers that pinpointed the “interconnectedness between Denmark and the wider Nordic regions regarding historic and contemporary issues of racism and racialization”. We do not explicitly discuss similarities and differences between Denmark and Sweden. However, we hope and believe that our experiences, reflections and ways to resist racism and Othering in Sweden and Swedish academia through alternative coalition building, based on mutual care and love, can be relevant in a Danish context, too.

Swedish Whiteness

We are connected through Swedish academia, where we work or have worked as professors, postdocs, associate professors, or doctoral students. Some of us live in Sweden, some have left and live elsewhere, others are commuting. One of the experiences that we all share is the sense of being Othered in Swedish academia or/and society. In our collective, some of us are white and Nordic, but in a Swedish context become foreigners, in particular, by not totally being trusted as someone who legitimately can embody the values of the exceptionally ‘worldleading’ Swedish version of ‘Nordicness’, i.e. the particularly Swedish version of white innocence (Wekker 2016). Others are considered white but are also ethnically outside of the hegemonic Swedishness as they belong to the colonized Other of Sweden, the Sámi (Knoblock & Kuokkanen 2015). Others in the collective carry a whiteness that is not considered part of the assumed ‘progressive’ whiteness of ‘Norden’ (Loftsdóttir & Jensen 2016; Lundström & Teitelbaum 2017; Lundström & Hübinette 2020). Some of us are racialized as foreigners, and thus become seen and read as non-Swedish (Hübinette & Tigervall 2009; Koobak & Thapar-Björkert 2012; Koobak 2013; Tlostanova, Thapar-Björkert & Koobak

2016; Thapar-Björkert & Tlostanova 2018). Others experience a peculiar invisibilizing/hyper-visibilizing distortion that erases colonial and Indigenous aspects of their identity to put forward the homogenizing geopolitical difference (discrimination by passport) as the main racializing factor (Tlostanova, Thapar-Björkert & Knoblock 2019; Koobak, Tlostanova & Thapar-Björkert 2021). Even for those of us who have lived in Sweden most of our lives, becoming a Swede is almost impossible when embodying a Black female body (Kawesa 2004; 2006; forthcoming; Sawyer 2006; Habel 2012; Adeniji 2014). Some of us are migrants from the Middle East, carrying with them the dual stigma of a threat/victimized Other, never the knowing subject (Teschfahney 2001; Mulinari & Neergaard 2005). One way or another, we are all living the life of the Other in a country in which whiteness has a dark history and race is a hush word that shall not be whispered! In other words, ‘Othering’ takes on different shapes and variations, depending on our different positionalities and localities, yet it is connected to a hegemonic notion of whiteness and the denial of structural racism, which we address in this section.

There are three aspects of whiteness within the Swedish context that are important to unpack. First, there is the hegemonic whiteness which is overwhelmingly opaque, while simultaneously excluding many people who might be considered white in other societies. Western whiteness is constructed along racial hierarchies that historically positioned Swedish whiteness at the top of what is known as the Germanic race, and thus constructing Swedes as the whitest of all white nations (Hübinette et al. 2012). Living in a country where whiteness is equivalent to Swedishness (Mattsson & Pettersson 2007; Hübinette & Lundström 2014) creates a hierarchy of whiteness and hegemonic notion of whiteness against which all other bodies are measured as ‘not white enough’.

Second, hegemonic whiteness in the Swedish context should be also examined through its relationship with colonialism (Hübinette et al. 2012; Loftsdóttir & Jensen 2016; Keskinen et al. 2018; Alm et al. 2021). In fact, Sweden is described as

a society that has difficulties in consolidating its past and present forms of colonialism. The historical archive of Swedish colonialism paints it as innocent of colonial whiteness, and normalizes the idea that Sweden hardly engaged in colonialism, and if it did, it was to a very small extent which does not count. This sense of white innocence (Wekker 2016) has become normalized, while we know that Sweden participated in the Transatlantic slave trade and abolished slavery in 1847 (Lönn 2007) and at the same time, the colonialization of Sámi is still ongoing. When examining colonial complicity (Vuorela 2009), it is important to explore how gendered and racialized power structures are constructed in the Nordic countries and to awaken the amnesia that denies Sweden's colonialism. In this context, it is also important to point to the feminist scholarship that engages with racism and colonialism in the Nordic countries as a way of troubling Nordic exceptionalism and bringing Indigenous knowledges from a Sámi perspective to the forefront in relation to the colonial history and present of the Swedish state (Knoblock 2022).

Third, we should address the elephant in the room: race. Similar to other European contexts (Goldberg 2006; El-Tayeb 2011), the critical discourse of race is evidently absent in Sweden. One of the difficulties of being Othered in Sweden is the lack of a common discourse that addresses the implications of Swedish whiteness and racism. It becomes difficult to create a joint framework because the Nordic version of European whiteness, and its particular Swedish materialization denies race as a social category and subscribes to a color-blind ideology (Bonilla-Silva 2013) as the political norm. In Sweden, the word race was erased from all public documents and substituted with ethnicity (Hambraeus 2014) which makes it harder to pinpoint the racialization process in Sweden as involving white Swedes and their white privileges. Racial issues are translated as ethnic, religious, or cultural problems, while leaving the scrutiny of Swedish whiteness unmarked and invisible. This color-blind ideology that is specifically Swedish, is a "certain kind of progressive antiracism" (Hübinette 2017) which

can be differentiated from other Western states where color-blindness is linked to neoliberalism (Goldberg 2006; Bonilla-Silva 2013). At best, race and racism are addressed as an issue of the past, one that Sweden has put behind; a problem of another geopolitical context; or a problem of a few 'bad apples,' and not an overwhelmingly common presence or a structural problem, even after the Swedish Parliamentary elections on September 11, 2022 when the Swedish Democrats became the second largest party¹ (Sands 2022). Therefore, it is important to discuss whiteness and explore its power dimensions from a critical race perspective that foregrounds how institutions function to conceal power relations based on white privilege (see e.g. Loftsdóttir & Jensen 2016; Alm et al. 2021).

In our Loving Coalition, we have made space for the articulation of race and whiteness, and how it has affected our daily lives and working environments. This has been important, as it can be difficult to fully express the daily frustration, pain and suffering that are caused by whiteness and racism in our lives. Having entered Sweden through different routes, Loving Coalitions has become a space for our articulation and theorizing of decolonial, critical race and whiteness understandings of our positionalities in a color-blind Swedish society where the white hegemony is overwhelmingly yet unmarked (Habel 2008; Hübinette et al. 2012; McEachrane 2014). Swedish whiteness remains an invisible power structure through which anti-racism and gender equality are being articulated (Hübinette & Lundström 2014). Although the epistemic habit of whiteness in relation to Nordic academic feminism (Dahl 2021) has been examined along with the crisis of whiteness (Keskinen 2018), Swedish scholars continue to mostly engage with issues pertaining to Swedish Whiteness. At the same time, Critical Race Studies related to Swedish racism (Motsieloa 2003; Mulinari & Neergaard 2005; Schmauch 2006; Kalonaityte, Kawesa & Tedros 2007; 2008) leaves a lot of room for research on Swedish whiteness in gender studies and antiracist scholarship.

Politics of belonging and exclusion are tied up in the way we work and live in Sweden and

elsewhere, making an understanding of intersectional oppressions important for our collective (see e.g., Crenshaw 1991; de los Reyes and Mulinari 2005; Kontturi, Tiainen, Mehrabi & Leppanen 2023). As we are also impacted by the blindness to racism in Swedish gender studies, our work in Loving Coalition involves challenging Nordic and Swedish hegemonic feminism (Dahl, Liljeström & Manns 2016; Lykke 2020). We are, moreover, concerned about the Swedish shift to neoliberalism since the early 1990s (Boréus 1997) and its ethno-nationalist right-wing shift, which has an increasingly oppressive effect on migration policies and has led to an increased criminalization of those perceived as Others (Schierup, Ålund & Neergaard 2018).

Writing in Loving Coalitions - Methodologies

The groupwork started from the methodology of Collective Memory Work (CMW) (Haug 1987; Stephenson, Kippax & Crawford 1996; Onyx & Small 2001), aiming at finding common ground where our situated experiences of becoming Non-Swedish in Swedish academia seemed to intersect. But it soon became clear that this approach was not letting us move beyond the critique of the neoliberal/colonial university, and we still ended up producing coherent, rational, although substantially embodied narratives of our experiences.

Thus, we began to integrate a broader palette of creative writing methodologies (Lykke 2014) in the memory work. Basically, Loving Coalitions has focused on three main writing methodologies: writing on common themes, automatic writing, and letter-writing. Theme-writing defines the memory-work methodology which was the starting-point for our group work. We chose to enrich this methodology through automatic writing and letter-writing inspired by creative writing methods which some of us were familiar with (previously used in teaching and/or research).

Automatic writing (Lykke 2014) implies that before the writing session, the group agrees on a topic, to which we are all committed (i.e.,

“becoming non-Swedish in Swedish Academia”). We also decide upon a time frame (i.e., 10 minutes), and, on a signal from the timekeeper, all of us begin to write with the instruction to start from the shared topic and write everything that comes to mind without lifting the pen from the paper or the fingers from the keyboard. Afterwards, we take turns in reading our texts out loud to each other. The group responds to the texts, looking for resonances and differences between the memories, and for key themes to take further into new group writing exercises.

The genealogy of automatic writing is artistic and spiritual. The methodology was developed by writers and visual artists of the Surrealist movement (Rosemont 1998), and in different spiritual practices (Conley 2016). Inspired by psychoanalysis, the Surrealists wanted the artistic process to disrupt boundaries between a rationally acting ‘I’ and its unconscious bodily agencies, and to engage in spontaneous, collective writing (or drawing) processes in resonance with the unconscious mind. But in addition to disrupting borders between the conscious and the unconscious, they were also keen on radically undoing the boundaries between the ‘I’ and the world ‘out there’, between subject and object, between ‘real’ and ‘not-real’, as ontologically separable entities. Surrealism intonates a radical break with the reality principle that resonates with contemporary critiques of positivism and its hierarchizing representationalism and objectification of subaltern subjects, as well as with artistic research and decolonizing moves to revitalize Indigenous philosophies that take dreamworlds and spiritmatter seriously (Black 2018; Schaeffer 2018). Thus, automatic writing was summoned by the Surrealists to transgress the rational and sovereign authorial subject of modern writing and art-making. We chose to integrate this methodology into our memory-work to enable ourselves to articulate not only rational analyses of our memories, but also to grapple with the strong affects that the memory-work called forward.

The second methodology to be integrated in our memory-work, the writing of personal letters to each other, was added to our repertoire

to make the automatically written texts enter into conversation with each other beyond the round of responses. Letter-writing has become a way of moving from spontaneously articulated individual experiences of intersectional oppression and resistance, to collectively unfolding analytical levels, enabling us to put individual perspectives in committed conversations, while still doing it from an embodied and affectively situated perspective - i.e., in the format of an engaged letter, written by an 'I', lovingly committed to a 'you' (Knoblock & Stubberud 2021). The letter-writing has also opened for more direct engagements with internal hierarchies and our structurally different relations to vulnerable topics such as race, migrant status, privilege, whiteness, queerness, etc.

We use these writing modes playfully alongside each other, and share the general approach that methodologies should not be understood as once and for all congealed entities 'to be applied', but as emergent, plastic, malleable, always in an ongoing process of dynamic unfolding. To enrich and deepen our conversations and trusting coalition building, we practice feminist bridging - trying carefully to avoid glossing over intersectional differences and structural power differentials along the lines of racialization, migration status, geo- and corpopolitical situatedness, sexual identity, positioning in the academic job hierarchy, labour market relations, language, and existential differences such as health status, age, various kinds of personal experience of trauma and loss, or joyful circumstances, which cross-cut our group.

I cannot find a starting point. My thoughts are floating in all sorts of directions as I attempt to stay on top of things, in control. My head is pounding from exhaustion, the neck strained from not having slept well, the patch behind my ears aching from the glasses which are a bit tight after the last readjustment at the optometrist, I am longing for a break. Yet I have shown up for our writing group meeting, knowing that I can share my thoughts, feel a bit more grounded, marvel at the creativity of my colleagues, feel their energy. Sometimes love is about showing up. Persistently. When you have a

million things to do. When your body is not at its most comfortable. When you feel empty of ideas. But you show up because you remember. You remember how this commitment has been a lifeline for you in moments when academia takes over your body, your mind, your mental health. When it sucks you dry and you have nothing else to give. You remember that the coalitions you have built, the loving coalitions, keep you sane. You remember the best moments when you have felt the most free in expressing yourself in just a matter of minutes, surprising yourself at what you can still draw from the depth of your mind when you thought you have nothing left to give. You show up because you remember. And you remember because you keep showing up. The magic of a 10-minute writing exercise, in silence, alone, but together. You forget the aches and the pain and the anxieties or when you can't you write about that and you arrive at a different sense of reality, one that gives you back your grounding, gives you back to yourself as you are, with others. [Automatic Writing Text with the theme of loving coalitions. Author: Redi]

Building Bridges – Building Trust

Loving Coalitions – the name of a group. Where did it come from – this name? Maria invented it, I think. But it is in the plural. There are many coalitions. Criss-crossing our group. Criss-crossing other groups, which affiliated members of this group participate in. They are all entangled in each other. [Part of Automatic Writing text with the theme of loving coalitions. Author: Nina]

How do we know how to trust a bridge; that it will hold? The fact that some of us have known each other for a long time has played an important role, since we had already developed loving coalitions in many different forms. Some were more like 'newcomers' to these entanglements and had to be introduced by one of the people involved. Let's be honest, we all had our 'test criteria' in order to start trusting each other. For instance, in the very first meeting, one of us asked a crucial question: who is going to save and store everything we

exchange and share in the group? The immediate answer was “we will all have access to save and store everything we share as a group”. All our texts and video recordings of our conversations are stored, accessed and editable by each one of us. There is no individual ownership. That was one important step towards building trust. Trust was right there, confirming that we are not going to reproduce the normative academic standards of competition, maximization of individual citations, and high jacking of knowledges. We were building an alliance.

It is also important to mention that the constellation of the group changed along the road. In the first months, three members of the group decided not to continue participating and after a while two more members joined us. Since then, we have consistently been working together as a group of seven. It's been two and half years that we have been meeting on zoom every month and in between we exchange letters, texts and numerous emails.

Thanks to our different training, interests, and writing idiosyncrasies, we had the chance to try working with our memories differently. CMW is a great feminist methodological option, and one of us had ‘successfully’ deployed it in the past and continues to use and re-invent it. But it was not enough for Loving Coalitions. Once we delved into automatic writing and letters – and continued to fiction and poetry as well – our memories started breathing and moving like living beings, drawing us into passionate loving coalition building. Allowing ourselves to ‘draw out of the margins’ of academic writing helped us reach the more corporeal, affective, and hence messier, contradictory, controversial, difficult to access corners of our situated experiences. We were still working on collectivizing our memories but in a more creative way.

As academics specializing in antiracism, critical whiteness studies, African feminisms, queer death studies, Indigenous feminisms, Sámi studies, decolonial feminisms, postsocialist feminisms, critical migration studies, anti-genderism, we were all familiar with how to talk about our geopolitical differences, yet related situatedness. However, our creative writings, directly, and nearly

magically, spoke to our vulnerable and at the same time more resilient human sides, the ones that we all carried with us in the group. Acknowledging our common, yet different forms of vulnerability, and common, yet different strategies of resistance, have sparked even more trust in each other; a stronger sense of a collective understanding. Our texts have also pointed to how much we need each other, how much we crave for loving coalitions and how important they are as forms of resistance, and as Madina loves saying, as possibilities of *re-existence* (thinking with Adolfo Albán 2009). Our creative writings also revealed how much work, time and commitment para-institutional coalitions like ours entail.

Creative writing and becoming an intellectual academic and Antiracist Feminist is something that I long for, becoming that person that I know I am capable of being and breathing from that space that I have created for myself, where my ideas, are not attacked but taken in, breathed in and energized by others...I long for spaces like that where power dynamics and hierarchies are not about destruction, but empowerment, where one's desire to be and overcome struggles that are meant to destroy you can be met, and taken seriously, a loving coalition that leaves room and space to grow and become...I have found that space....it is a challenging space, because it's not just about being comforted, taken in, accepted and loved, but also giving back, being there, being accountable and honoring others' time and work. I have often been bad at doing that, felt sorry for myself, and got lost in the feeling of not being good enough, and therefore not able to give, because what is there to give, when what you have is not good enough? Holding on, and holding back gifts to others, that might mean love to them, not giving which has also meant not being able to receive. But through the years, my relationship with Nina has really helped me survive. It's my first loving coalition with a person, but I was told she could never love me...a white professor, what does she know about my suffering as a black woman? What does she know of race and white privilege when she has all that privilege? She taught me everything I need to know about loving coalitions. [Automatic

Writing text with the theme of loving coalitions.
Author: Victoria]

Resisting Chrono-powers

The question of time (and temporality) has been central in our endeavor to build trust and a stable feminist alliance while we are challenging the standardized academic knowledge production modalities. So, against the frenetic chrono-politics of the neoliberal/colonial academia, we decided to intentionally slow down. Isabelle Stengers (2018) has reminded us in her *manifesto for slow science*, that fast science could be compared with fast food: quickly prepared, not particularly good, and it clogs up the system. Although Stengers directs her plea for slow science to those academics who work in technoscience, that kind of fast, competitive, benchmarked research has been steadily normalized in all academic disciplines. Despite our subjectivities being forcefully accustomed to these research modalities, we all committed to a slow collective research process without any guarantees of quantifiable outcomes or promises for publications in journals with high impact factor. Putting aside our fears, that for some of us exponentially increase with every second that brings us closer to the end of our temporary contracts, and for others increase because we are expected to bring money to their institutions instead of 'fooling around', we have allowed space and offered our time to this feminist collective. We have offered our patience for organically building trust, finding our methodological ways to engage with the burning issues we want to delve into and letting things emerge instead of forcing or pre-determining them. Parallel to our 'official' and more easily quantifiable work-related responsibilities as seen in the eyes of the institution, and next to the myriads of other kinds of emotional and physical labor involved in the social reproduction of everyday life, we have dedicated time, energy and creativity to build something together, with each other and for each other.

Simply slowing down might be considered the loudest form of resistance to what Sarah

Sharma calls "power-chronography", imposed by neoliberal capitalism: in its logic "capital caters to the clock that meters the life and lifestyle of some of its workers and consumers, the others are left to recalibrate themselves to serve the dominant temporality" (2014, 139). In other words, power-chronography raises crucial questions such as; whose time counts as worthy or valuable and whose bodies need to adapt to the 'right'/expected temporalities and rhythms or who needs to wait while looking at others moving smoothly through time? These time related divisions obviously cut along racial, geopolitical, and gender lines, clearly manifesting the alignment of the academic power-chronography with the coloniality of time. In his fascinating work, Riyad A. Shahjahan thoroughly explains how the modern conceptualizations of time as linear, progressive, and quantifiable in standardized units, "underpin our theories of student development, faculty development, etc." (2015, 490). Moreover, engaging with decolonial thinkers, Shahjahan reminds us of the unquestionable modern and neoliberal value of being efficient and productive, so deeply internalized by academics and students, originate in modernity, and its darker colonial side. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) notes, "Representations of native life as being devoid of work habits, and of native people being lazy, indolent, with low attention spans, is part of colonial discourse that continues to this day" (cited in Shahjahan 2015, 492).

In a recently co-authored article by two of us (Vlachou & Tlostanova 2022), we discuss exactly the fear and anxieties of racialized academics with being absent from work for too long, risking to be labeled as lazy and slow. In particular, the academics we talked with shared their stories about working in Scandinavian institutions during the Covid pandemic, and the institutional pressure to be physically present while their colleagues (mostly white Scandinavians and North Europeans), were working from home. On top of that, they had to deal with the additional migration-related delays and complications without the support of their institutions. To exemplify, below we present an extract from an interview, quoted in the article:

M: I didn't find it fair because when I finally arrived at my department, I was totally alone the first days. Everybody was working from home. Many of my colleagues were working from home for months and they were planning to continue to do so for as long as the pandemic lasts. But I had to prove that I care more about my new position than I care about my health or the health of my sister, that I had to leave before she was fully recovered. And then I started wondering – you know, I am one of the very few non-EU in my department from the global south – if they hired me just for filling the quota and not because I really deserve it, or they really liked my proposed project. Since I moved here, I feel like I always need to prove myself more than the others, so I need to work harder than anyone else. I need to expose my body to the virus by coming to the university while the others can safely work from home (ibid., 12).

All of us in our collective have, in different yet interrelated ways, experienced in our flesh the pressure to overperform in an academic environment that keeps count with its colonial/racialized clock, as vividly depicted in the stories of the people we talked with. Nevertheless, our writings and conversations on time expanded beyond academia and included memories from all areas of our lives and life in general. In the following section we present some of our creative texts on the theme of time.

Contemplations on the theme of time

Ieddne/Ädno [mother/river]

Tiny creature,
tiny precious creature
growing in my warm waters
you enter time, linear

or layered?

Born and named
In *gidádálvve*, spring-winter,
second of eight seasons,
wheel of life and continuity,
you carry

the name
of your *máttaráddjá*,
great-grandfather

and the rivers run,
and the rivers run,
slowly, generatively
differently than

since time immemorial

my child, you learn
to swim in colder waters
embraced by

the silent river,
the stilled river

the power grid,
that keeps on giving

light

the world, electric
beams

as it crumbles

[Poem produced through the reworking of the author's automatic writing text on time. Author: Ina]

Sweden! – Time is running out!

Jimmie Åkesson, the Party leader of the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*), a far-right racist Nationalist Party, tweeted on 10 June 2021 that: "Unlike Magdalena Andersson [then the Prime Minister of Sweden] and her Social Democrats, we will neither leave nor abandon our roots." He posted an image of a poster that the

Sweden Democrats used during their glory days of creating the organization BSS (*Preserve Sweden Swedish*).

BSS was a racist far-right organization with Nazi roots formed in 1979. The organization's goal was to advocate for limited immigration and deportation of immigrants living in Sweden. BSS held its first annual meeting in Stockholm on 20 March 1983 (Larsson & Ekman 2001, 75). In 1988, the BSS members together with *Sverigepartiet* (Sweden Party) formed the Sweden Democrats, which continued to use the slogan "Preserve Sweden Swedish" (*Bevara Sverige Svenskt*) until the late 1990s (Widfeldt 2015, 181).

When I saw this tweet yesterday, memories of the summer of 1984, when I was nine years old and came to Sweden as a refugee, came back lingering to me. We had finally arrived in Sweden, the land that would keep us safe, my mother told us on our way to Stockholm Arlanda. The flight was long, and I was not sure that we would really be safe. I felt lost when I looked around the plane, and saw only white pale faces, men in suits laughing, singing, and talking loudly in a language that sounded strange and alien. I pulled my mom's arm, trying to get her attention. "Mom", I said, "Mom, I don't think I will be able to learn that language." My mom just smiled, as if it did not matter, we were heading to safety. She had finally managed to take us away from Uganda, after my father was killed during the Idi Amin war.

Mom was right, I found new friends in our new home Husby, a suburb in Stockholm. There was a certain newfound sense of safety knowing that soldiers would not come to our home to threaten to kill us, or rob us, and I did not have to hide under a bed at night because of gunshots. I could finally breathe, and just enjoy playing and being a kid. Walking around in the sun, I would listen to my favorite playlist on my Walkman. This year was pivotal in pop music history. Michael Jackson made history with his album *Thriller*, and Madonna busted on the music scene with "Like a Virgin". I played every day that summer with my new best friends, who came from Chile and Uganda. Some of them were graffiti painters, usually painting their art under the tunnels of bridges around the

neighborhood transforming dull, grey concrete walls into bright, loving, happy colors.

I learned from my new friends about the meaning of the ugly scribbles that were sprayed in the tunnels and sometimes on the outside of our houses. In large black letters someone had sprayed BSS on our building, and the same letters were sprayed over the beautiful graffiti art that my friends had worked so hard on. But who would do this, I asked? One of the graffiti painters from Chile explained what BSS meant, telling me that some Swedes did not want foreigners in Sweden. They wanted us to go back to our countries, so that Sweden remained only for white Swedes. They even wanted to kill us, he said. I was astonished and scared, wondering if my mom knew this about Sweden. My new friends who had lived in Sweden longer, convinced me that Sweden is our country too, and that there was a way to take it back. My friends had a strategy, which was to change the symbol BSS into BSB (*Bevara Sverige Blandat*), which meant "Preserve Sweden Mixed".

We spent the summer of 1984, listening to pop music, break dancing, creating graffiti Art, but also taking political action by using our spray cans transforming every "S" in BSS into a "B" as in "BSB".

When I look back at the summer of 1984, now 37 years later, and what has happened to Sweden, I am stunned that the Swedish Democrats, who got into Parliament 2010, now have almost 18 percent of the Swedish votes, thus becoming the third largest parliamentary Party in Sweden.

I am writing this text 14 June 2021, a year before the Parliamentary elections in Sweden September 2022. This might be the last summer that we might still have a chance to keep the BSS movement away from entering the Swedish Government. I hope that the BSB movement will win the Parliament Elections, so that I can tell that 9-year-old refugee girl from 1984 that we can still believe that we are safe in Sweden, but time is running out. [Story based on childhood memories produced through the reworking of the author's automatic writing text on time. Author: Victoria]

Waiting

It took me months when we said we should write about temporality. As I started blabbing on the paper, urging the urge for writing, focusing on 'time' and thinking-writing rather than feeling-writing, I spouted my thoughts on the paper focusing on academia rather than temporality itself.

It took me months and a stomach wrenching sensation of 'something is wrong'. It took me weeks of not wanting to write more into my writing for the next memory-work meeting before I realized I did not connect to what I wrote. At least not when I think of temporality. I was not connected to the temporality about which I was trying to write. I did not even dream about it, not once! And I dream about everything! As I was feeling desperate to write, because I wanted to, and I knew that I do have something to say, I decided to wait for the dream. Eventually, and as I was waiting for the inspiration to come to me in a dream, I realized, *waiting* itself is what I want to write about. The all-consuming, bodily demanding, hopeful, fearful, promising but also ominous, waiting tells the story of all immigrants in exile, and I am one.

I could not stop thinking about waiting! I have been living it for the past 10 years with all my might. When did waiting become a chore? When did waiting become something more than merely the joyful anticipation before the new year's celebration in my grandmother's house? When did waiting become the state of my life as time passes me by? When did waiting become stressful moments, minutes, days, weeks and months between visa application, grants applications, deadlines, and academic steps? Not that it is not joyful anymore, for I immensely enjoy my work! But, waiting became my life. Waiting consumed me and vomited me into something intense, hooked on medication and therapy sessions, numb, unable to connect to my body, always on a 100 percent speed. And yet, wanting more, wanting to go faster. There is so much more I want to do. As if there is not now, I became a child of tomorrow, stuck in my past memories of the now I once imagined, and its future which I wanted to change in that imaginary now. I embodied waiting, I became waiting in the process.

Waiting is an academic space-time for me in which I become an immigrant. My research, my work is my drug. It gives me joy, but it also numbs me from enduring all I had to endure, and that I still have too, and the enduring that is yet to come. Drowning myself in the academic temporality and riding the waves diffracts the reality of being in exile and being in pain, in waiting. It ignites me to articulate waiting into something, a space of agency. How can I channel and diffract my life, my waiting with that of others? How do people become racialized as their lives and their bodies are put on hold in waiting? How do they deal? I digest my own experience, feelings and every state of being in a hamster wheel as I search through stories of waiting in my informants' tales. I wait with them and taste their ways of waiting. As they tell me stories about missing their families, waiting to be heard, waiting to fit in, waiting to get access. Waiting is a fearful joy, a chore, a wish, a way of connecting. It is also to see what is missing. To ask, why are we left frozen in waiting? What does this waiting do to us? What does this waiting produce?

I wonder what attending to waiting generates. What am I doing as I wait? I am angry. I have been angry for a while. That is why I was hooked on medication in my first visit to the doctor. Though grateful for the medication as it kicked some life back to me, I wonder how I end up here? My anger, my burn out, my depression was translated by the doctor, the social worker and many others as the result of my childhood trauma. I guess my anger was not justified! Placed in the past, my anger, my state of mental health was reduced to the problems of the 'Other culture'. While all may be true, at least partially, I could not help but to shrink, feeling the burn of the stigma. Was my burnout and depression merely an outcome of my experiences of the far past? I could not wonder if my fellow academics who are not from 'those countries' are also asked the same questions when treated for a work-related burn out. They are not! I know. I am angry at myself because I would be angry equally, had the doctor not taken the 'culture matter' into consideration. What is wrong with me?

I guess what angers me is how the social worker put more weight on the far past in Iran than the past years in Sweden, easily making the burn-out an 'immigrant issue'. What about the trauma of being an immigrant in a country that does not want you? A country, that while posing as a safe haven for refugees, makes sure that you, the refugee, the immigrant, knows your place. Be grateful, do not take space, and learn the Swedish way of life better than that of a Swede. Or to be isolated and it is 'your' fault for failing to integrate. What about the trauma of constantly rethinking every word, every phrase that comes out of your mouth not because of the accent, which is also daunting, but because of the fear to cross a line, suggest an academic insult, in a context which has no traces of the familiar? What about the promises of patiently waiting; waiting for your turn in structures of power and the institutional must that you have no point of reference for, yet living it intimately in the flesh? What about the trauma of being called out by a student for not being able to speak Swedish in an evaluation form published on the university webpage? Waiting for things to get better, waiting to learn more about academic life in Sweden, waiting to become a citizen, waiting to get a job, any job! Waiting to finally feel at home, yet, strangely home remains to be somewhere else but not here. Waiting! [Story based on memories produced through the reworking of the author's automatic writing text on time. Author: Tara]

Unfinished Questions and a Magical Exit

We have not solved it all

Why are each of us in the group? How and when have we become a collective? How, despite our differences, can we still carve out a space for shared values and goals? What are we holding back, what are we ready to suppress just so we can keep the group together? It's more important for us to keep and focus on what we share instead of challenging our vulnerability.

A collective text analyzing intersections and differences in our approaches and sensibilities, could be helpful in trying to become more aware of our identification as a collective and also a hot-house for formulating and trying out ideas including the antiracist feminist decolonial discussions that could be later shared with other groups, as well as with the public. Our Loving Coalitions are still an experiment - not all of the things we have tried out have been successful. There are no ready-made recipes, no definite answers. Turning to the world, we are also asking how valid this anti-racist work is for other people? To what extent can we afford being slow with such an urgent and topical agenda? Although a safe and healing space, how can the collective also be a way to actively fight against many forms of attacks, not just shielding ourselves?

All of these are unfinished questions, and we will keep struggling with them, but we have learnt that it is better to work on them in Loving Feminist Coalitions than in individual isolation.

To magically exit the article, we will summon a short glossary, collected among the many keywords which filled our letters on the theme of feminisms:

Ability to perceive intersections of our experiences, values and dreams
Cannot exist in singular
Constant state of learning
Dancing-Whirling-Spinning
Decoloniality
Everyday way of living in struggle with others
Grandmothers and mothers
Hard to cram into instrumental pigeonholes
Interconnected with Indigenous worldviews
Intergenerational
Leap of faith
Love
Matristic
More-than-Human
Never-ending struggle,
Obuntu Bulamu
Queerfemme
Relationality
Response-ability

Stubborn kitchen table
Theory in the Flesh
Vibrant, not violent

Witchery
Wonderland

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Notes

- ¹ In the general Swedish elections of 2022, the far-right Sweden Democrats party became the second-largest party with above 20 percent of the popular vote.