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Collaborative Writing: Notes on Methodology

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What brought us to collaborative writing? What did it yield in terms of building community? How does the politics of location play out especially when writers belong to deeply differential locations?
How did our collaborations counter knowledge production/dissemination?
What are the openings, disruptions, and opportunities within our methodologies?
How did our process orient us to rupture academia and “formal” modes of knowledge production?

How do you resist power when you are yet to understand its (dis)continuities, permutations, assemblages,
and the ghosts it conjures?

BY REMAINING HAUNTED?

Niharika/Samia

The method adopted in our paper reflects the conversation, discussions and trepidation we have in person, outside of the paper. Our attempt was to make academic writing as visceral and raw as our everyday engagements/ experiences are. Our method departed from how co-writing is often done in academics, that is, authors often distribute sections of the paper and collate individual pieces of work into one. We took up the conversations we had had over the course of a year, we further dissected them, found moments of solidarity and reflections. It is only then that the documentation made it to the paper.

Archiving, reading, and writing as intentional responses.

Samia: “Perhaps the only way I would like to spend 5th August is by writing.”

Our collaborative writing methodology is experiential and experimental. It offers no guarantees but a feminist journey of un/learning and being in community differently.

Who walks how much; are we meeting halfway? Is it possible to even demand meeting halfway with material differences in our subject locations: as a colonised person & other who is part of the colonising state?

An anticolonial feminist meeting place; a feminist journey and story of intimacy, solidarity, friendship but no finality.

We began with questions, introspections, in the hope of learning more fully and being differently.

“We feel a sense of loss – different yet shared – on offering these archives and experiences to the world. Will readers embody a reparative stance and read this with the intention we propose?”

“Would the readers of this paper read about the world we seek to imagine,
or is that limited to authors’ experience of archive?”

“Hope the readers cross-read our cross-readings.”

Solidarity, whether through writing or material and affective practices has to be intentional and aware of differences that cannot be transcended or played down. This is not about transcendence.

CROSS-READINGS

INTIMATE ARCHIVES; AN ARCHIVE OF INTIMACY

LOSS, ANXIETY, UNCERTAINTY

RESISTANCE

FAILURE; WE KEEP ON YEARNING, BEING, DREAMING OF "UTOPIAS"

RESPIRE; A PAUSE?

Qais/Wazina

Q: We came to write this piece in relation to the performance we have created of the queer Muslim burial and death. This co-writing became a form of healing and connections that we both were missing in our queer, Muslim and Afghan communities. Collective reflections on our lived experiences became:

Community building, healing

Nourishing

Translation of experiences – academic, cultural identities, how we hold insider-outsider roles in so many ways (positionality and geographies/literally)

Meeting over Zoom to build trust, learn one another, and authentically collaborate on our strengths: generative conversations without being contrived

W: our collaboration was manifested with the intention to tease/facilitate/support the knowledge, knowings, and creativity of one another without a product in mind. For me, it was an exercise in mindfulness, intentionally unlearning production: the benchmarks of success, timelines, deadlines, deliverables, even noticing my attempts to have an agenda for our weekly conversations because really, there is no way to schedule humanity! Particularly noticing the ways socio-cultural conditioning manifests with and within my hyphenated selves.

This co-writing became a form of healing and connections that we both were missing in our queer, Muslim, and Afghan communities.

A feminist queer collaboration allowed us to form a dosti that is rooted in our vulnerabilities, shared culture and love for our home we have left yet hold in our hearts from afar, Afghanistan.

How do you collaboratively resist the logics of erasure and the layers of invisibility produced by systems of power?

Myriam/Malek

Collaboration is rendering legible a network of care, co-conspiring. It's a conjuring of friendship. Entanglements between people are already collaboration.

To write together is to refuse the requirements of individualism that center authorship against coproductions.

I think of our collaboration like our friendship, a series of threads that go in every possible corner, that extend, cut, stay at the surface or slide underwater, woven back and back.

We began by choosing to write to each other, be in conversation through emails with one another before imagining an outside.

There is no ending, just a conversation that takes on another corner, precisely because the systems we seek to fight have not stopped talking either.

"I don't have the patience to keep the walls of our confinements, not to cross the lines. I don't want to hold back. I want to invade space with all the surface of our needs."

Crisis, urgency, grief, anger, invisibility, against patriarchy, vulnerability, violence, porousness, slippages, knots, intimacy.

"I reckon this friendship is also celebrating its revolutionary decade."

Through this exchange we found links that could only exist in the collaboration: how invisibility was not only discursive but seen and felt and countered through text and image.

What should we ought to read together? What is our collective genealogy, who is our analytical kin?

Inserting ourselves in traditions and practices that have historically considered us outsiders – claiming them, queering the fuck out of them, and owning them.

Coming together

Benazir: Can this collaborative writing become a way to speak as myself – a young Muslim woman? What is the texture of my voice when not speaking as the “respondent”/ “interlocutor” in research projects?

Madhulika: How does one nurse the scars of ethnographic writing during PhD? Can collaborative writing help me harbor mutuality, love, and care for those I met during research?

Writing Friendship (Process and positions)

Benazir: What can we write about, and what do we write? How do I write to tell the world what altered my world much before 2020?

Madhulika: Can friendship be written outside the voice-representation nexus? Would it be narcissistic to only think of this friendship as “ours” when it is equally the women we have met who have shaped our intimate worlds?

Care work *during* collaborative writing

Benazir: Can any form of writing be enough to hold together all the fear and vulnerability one has experienced?

Madhulika: In the midst of collaborative writing, shouldn't we also prepare ourselves to stand *with* each other? To care for each other as we stumble through memories of despair?

Archiving: The troubles of “looking back”

Benazir: Where do I hide all that I did not choose to write? I was not keen on drawing any lines or boundaries, but this kind of collaborative writing oriented me to embrace honesty, guilt, risk, and accountability that comes with the process of writing.

Madhulika: What to do when archives are painful? As friends and collaborators, we set out to scratch the surface of many personal memories we have wanted to let go of. How does one think of the readability of a text when “writing” itself becomes choked?

Benazir: I felt as much as the collaboration was rooted in the political, it was etched into the personal.

Where do we go from here?

Benazir: Amidst the chaos of violence, I must find spaces to nurture healing and solidarity. It is in its sustenance, not momentariness, that I find promises of hope and love.

Madhulika: Can collaborative writing be situated as a methodological departure, and not an analytical arrival?