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For the Love of Research

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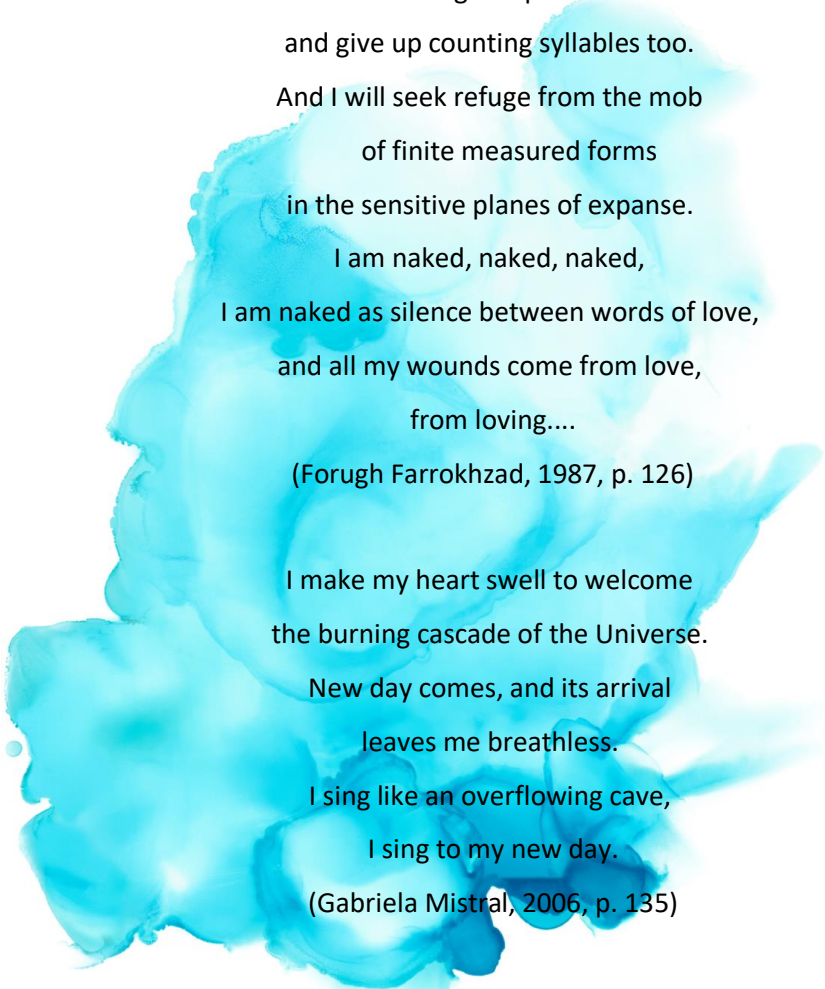
ABSTRACT. In this article, we discuss what we have learned about love and how it is perceived in academia. We wish to celebrate some of the complex global histories and contemporary practices of love as a political concept. While the concept of care is much more common than love in Eurocentric research that attends to issues of social justice, we suggest that love has much to offer the conversation. Following varied contributions from Black feminist, Indigenous and postcolonial lines of thought and drawing from sources across the social sciences, arts and humanities, we approach love as a choice of action that requires an open and honest atmosphere of trust and a collective will to work towards shared wellbeing. Based on this conceptualisation of love, we propose love as a premise and source of praxis for ethical research.

Keywords: love; research ethics; ethical research; change; refusal

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I shall give up lines
and give up counting syllables too.
And I will seek refuge from the mob
of finite measured forms
in the sensitive planes of expanse.

I am naked, naked, naked,
I am naked as silence between words of love,
and all my wounds come from love,
from loving....

(Forugh Farrokhzad, 1987, p. 126)

I make my heart swell to welcome
the burning cascade of the Universe.

New day comes, and its arrival
leaves me breathless.

I sing like an overflowing cave,
I sing to my new day.

(Gabriela Mistral, 2006, p. 135)

Introduction

Love is an essential need. Researchers study this (e.g., Maslow, 1943; Aronson, 1972; Rubin, 1973; Honneth, 2012), but we don't need research to know it is true. People have known this, across time and space, alone and in relation, as a core felt truth of being alive and in the world. We express it and experience it through hieroglyphs, gestures, pottery shards, melodies, lyrics, myths, glances, caresses, choices and the countless remembered and forgotten moments in which this ineffable experience parades its immanence around and through us. Throughout our collective history, we have been trying to understand love even as we participate in it. As researchers, we study it, with some futility, according to the bounds of our disciplines, citing individuals who have come before us as though the revelation that 'love is a need' belongs to them, and we need permission to move forward with the premise. Yet somehow, even in this common framing of

love as a need, so much research we encounter still tends to neglect the use of love as a relevant theoretical and philosophical concept. While there are several notable exceptions in the standard canons of the sociological, behavioural and educational sciences (such as the works cited throughout the subject headings in this piece; see also Zembylas, 2017; Johnson et al., 2019), we find much more openness within adjacent fields of decolonial, feminist and Indigenous studies. These fields, so often relegated to the ‘margins’ of academic research, offer world-shaking potential for the integration of love and justice, whether in education, social work, or the daily practices of living together. Attention to love *as praxis* has a great deal to offer mainstream trends in research, as it helps us to more fully integrate our awareness of the basic need for love in our lives with the responsibilities that our work carries.

As a fresh PhD student doing research with unaccompanied minors, Iida found this lack of attention to love in research very surprising. These young people who arrived in Finland to seek asylum without their primary caregivers needed love, like everyone else. But with their families not physically close, they found themselves searching for other opportunities for reciprocal love. Meanwhile, while working in an international boarding school, Melinda found it surprising that love was not explicitly referenced in curriculum and programme design. These youth, too, with their families not physically close, needed to rely on other opportunities for reciprocal love as well.

As teachers, both of us have encountered the expectation that we maintain narrowly defined professional distance in our work. We have been counselled, variously, to avoid discussing students’ personal lives with them at length, to ‘stick to the curriculum,’ to minimise contact after students graduate, to use surnames to ‘maintain respect for [our] authority,’ to refer students experiencing emotional distress to ‘the appropriate professionals,’ and so on. Yet these expectations are often in conflict with the expressed needs of those we work with. We wonder why, despite how obvious it seems in abstraction, the work of ensuring love in these young people’s lives is only occasionally attended to in academic research.

We find, in lieu of meaningful attention to love in the research archives, a tendency to emphasise a concept of *care* (Gilligan, 2014; De Graeve & Bex, 2017); this seems a much more comfortable space for Eurocentric research. When love *is* talked about in research, it often refers to romantic love, people’s perceptions of romantic love, or love within familial circles (e.g., Haldar, 2013; Sabey et al., 2018; Senior et al., 2020; Viejo et al., 2015). If it is attended to in other professional contexts, it needs an additional framework (e.g., pedagogical love, Kaukko et al., 2022; Kauhanen, 2022) to distance emotions from professionalism.

Another common discursive framework for love that may serve to limit its potential in research contexts is evident in Sara Ahmed’s (2014) work on the cultural politics of emotion. Here, Ahmed identifies ways in which the concept is understood as an energising emotion, frequently operationalised to encourage hate towards a separate *other* or a group of *others* (pp. 122-123). This orientation,

which Ahmed traces as far back as Freud's distinction between types of love in the European psychoanalytic tradition (pp. 125-129), demonstrates an additional and problematic set of undertones that might influence our willingness to work with the concept. While Ahmed recognises the action-potential of the experience of love (or hate) as an emotion, this source of action does not necessarily move us towards justice.

While the concept of care is often the default, we suggest that care is a distinct concept, one that has sometimes been criticised for suggesting harmful and unidirectional positions of power (Goldstein & Lake, 2000; Kaukko et al., 2022). While we acknowledge several encouraging trends in radical care research that approach the concept similarly to the ways in which we approach love (e.g., Held, 2006, on ethics of care; Clark-Kazak, 2023, on radical feminist ethics of care), we find value in directly emphasising love as a live concept specifically relevant to research. Love, as we see it, acknowledges *everyone's* capacity to participate in the work of learning, living and changing, and minimises the risk of insinuating an unexamined power differential that so often accompanies the use of the word care in research.

In contrast to some of the dominant historical trends in Eurocentric research, many Black, Indigenous and postcolonial writers, thinkers, teachers, community organisers and artists have been working with more expansive concepts of love for centuries. Among these are bell hooks, Audre Lorde, M. Jacqui Alexander, Denise Ferreira da Silva, Alexis Pauline Gumbs and Jennifer Nash, each of whom we rely on throughout this piece to help us raise and refine our questions as we weave them through our inquiry. From several Indigenous traditions, each of which celebrate and steward millennia-old practices of love that continue to refuse the destructive legacies of multiple genocides, we find the extensive contributions of Kim TallBear, Eve Tuck, Sandy Grande, Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Winona LaDuke especially relevant for elucidating the thresholds where our questions meet our praxis and pointing us towards our entanglement with the other-than-human world we move within. Contemporary contributions from the traditions of these scholars, and from many others working in parallel around the world, are garnering considerable attention in activist spaces (e.g., Black Lives Matter, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Palestinian Liberation movements and Marea Verde, to name a few), as they position their work against and beyond the genocidal legacies and contemporary structures of European coloniality. Simultaneously, research in the neoliberal university continues to encourage publications that privilege restrictive methods and performative language at the expense of action. We honour the contributions of those cited throughout this piece as teachers of the love we hope to encourage and centre in our own research praxis as we challenge some of the limiting trends of our inherited research traditions. We hold the following two questions in mind, posed by Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2020) in *Undrowned*:

- ‘How would we spend our time if we realised that the conflicts we are experiencing now urgently demand that we create a more loving world as soon as possible?’ (p. 83).
- ‘What are the scales of intimacy and the actual practices that would teach us how to care for each other beyond obligation or imaginary duties? Striped dolphins eat fish with luminous organs that live in the deep scattering layer of the sea. What nourishes them is literally what lights them up inside! Could we be like that?’ (p. 56).

With these questions at the opening of our inquiry, we offer the following sketch to guide the reader through the article.¹

1. Parallel Poem as Subject Headings

We begin with a poem Iida wrote after completing a PhD, *Barriers to Social Justice in Unaccompanied Youth’s Lives* (Kauhanen, 2023), with some slight adjustments as the ideas have developed for her over time. This poem serves as section headings, represented in boxes. The citations in these poem-form section headings reflect many of the works that supported Iida’s PhD and related inquiries, which we place in parallel with our current inquiry into research ethics as loving practice. We then expand on these parallels in new (to us) permutations in the body of the text of each section as we explore the questions and possibilities that this parallel framing brings to the fore.

Here, it is important to note that we approach the term ‘ethics’ as one that maintains a colloquial sense within the academic research context, a usage that is distinct from (yet often unconsciously beholden to) various philosophical stances that the Western canon perpetuates. Expectations of ethical research are often communicated through institutions as a set of expected or mandated practices. ‘Research ethics’ is accepted as a standalone concept in common parlance and, in our experience, is generally communicated this way in courses, workshops and other contexts in which researchers are trained to develop their work ethically. When we teach research ethics, we may offer passing mentions of ethical frameworks as teleological, utilitarian, deontological and so on. We might even conceptually differentiate between standard (Western) categories such as normative, meta- and applied ethics. But despite any superficial engagement with these concepts, our experience of institutional norms, processes and review board practices rarely indicates any deeper commitment to discerning the nuances of these philosophical distinctions. Thus, in this article, we see our work as interrogating the general academic approach to research ethics as we have experienced it, encouraging a type of engagement that diverges from the approaches we have encountered in academic contexts while embracing approaches that have inspired us from across the vast fields of critical theory, gender studies, postcolonial and decolonial studies, and Indigenous and feminist global thought and practice. Rather than ground out our work in research ethics within any existing philosophical

tradition, we treat ethics as the system itself does: a concept left undefined, with hidden assumptions and divergent meanings that we must nevertheless find a way to accommodate in or practice. As we attend to this challenge, we call upon varied sources of inspiration to help us navigate ethics as an open concept. We hope that this openness might allow the reader to bring their own nuanced perspectives to the ongoing challenge of defining ethical research practice as a foundation for activist-oriented praxis in academia and beyond.

2. Guide Quotes

We follow each section heading with two guide quotes from practitioners of love in the context of justice. These fragments of poems offer parallel insights into our inquiry from various temporal, spatial, cultural and existential standpoints. In a nod to our entanglement in the hegemonies of Eurocentric research, we follow the guide quotes with explanatory paragraphs, working to integrate the scholarship of those whose ideas and commitments we aspire towards in our research practice as we refine our inquiry. Our citational choices here represent a sampling of the many sources of inspiration that we have inherited and that continue to inform contemporary conversations across research disciplines and activist practices. Here, we both honour and challenge contemporary citational conventions, recognising the varied ways in which ideas come to us. Some of our tentative conclusions are experiential. Some are so clearly grounded in the works of thinkers who have come before us that we celebrate the opportunity to draw attention to their unique contributions. Some ideas have been windswept for so long in multiple cultural currents that it would be impossible to cite their point of origin; attempting to identify a few of the sources where they come to rest for a moment risks leaving out important contributions to such a degree that the possible harm of exclusion outweighs the benefit of inclusion. Here, we explicitly challenge the inherited academic assumption (cf. Aristotle, 322 BCE, as an example of how far back this conversation might go) that comprehensive attribution and classification of shared ideas is entirely possible in all contexts. We encourage an approach to citation as a loving practice that carries its own ethical conundrums, worthy of continual attention and in line with our overall intentions for this article.

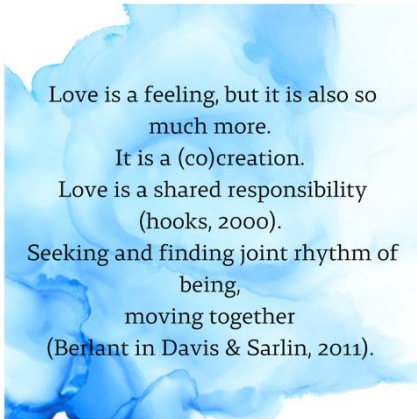
3. Conversation Transcript

Each section concludes with a transcript of conversation to honour the contingency of knowledge as it emerges specifically in our place and time, celebrating the permutations and emergent directions that are possible when we allow our inquiry to expand into more relational structures. In these sections, we hope to contribute a plural voice to the practices of framing resistance and refusing the categories thrust upon us by a system afraid of the expansiveness that love offers the process. The transcripts meander, and our thoughts do not move in straight lines. Here, we suggest that ethical research also requires some meandering. The formal structures of a research article, in their linear finality, pushing towards one specific

conclusion, often serve to exclude more than they include, whereas a loving practice holds open the potential for dwelling in the interstices of these trajectories. We ask the reader to consider, when the form does not restrict the content to such a degree as we are accustomed to, what else becomes possible? What meaning might emerge through the accidental divergences and unexpected combinations of ideas that happen through dialogue?

1

What is love?

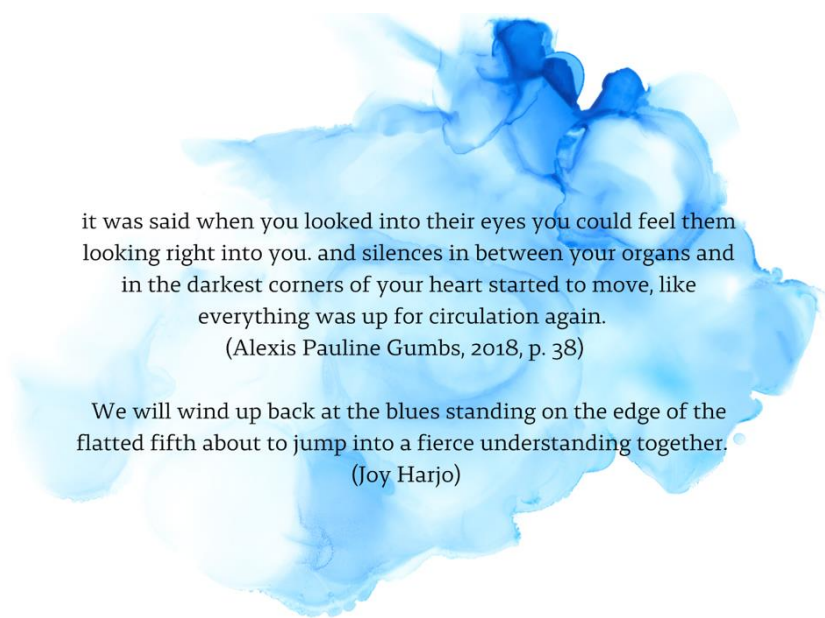


Love is a feeling, but it is also so much more.
It is a (co)creation.
Love is a shared responsibility
(hooks, 2000).
Seeking and finding joint rhythm of being,
moving together
(Berlant in Davis & Sarlin, 2011).

What is ethical research?



Doing research ethically is a feeling,
but it is also so much more.
It is a (co)creation.
Ethical research is a shared responsibility.
Seeking and finding a joint rhythm of being,
moving together.



it was said when you looked into their eyes you could feel them looking right into you. and silences in between your organs and in the darkest corners of your heart started to move, like everything was up for circulation again.
(Alexis Pauline Gumbs, 2018, p. 38)

We will wind up back at the blues standing on the edge of the flatted fifth about to jump into a fierce understanding together.
(Joy Harjo)

Returning again (and again, and again) to Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2020), we remember her telling us, ‘And love is where I know and do not know you. And love is where we began and where we begin’ (p. 63). As we move from our initial perceptions, felt in our singular bodies (i.e., the places where love narratives often get stuck), towards love as a choice, we begin to consider it an ethical dialogue in action. While we recognise that ‘choice’ is a word that can sometimes carry neoliberal implications that deny the differences in access to choice that systems of injustice perpetuate, we understand this concept as it applies to whatever choices are possible for each of us in our situated moments. In this sense, love becomes a responsibility to act, over and over again, in ways that our communication opens up possibilities for collective and collaborative justice. Here, we encourage and strive towards an approach that honours affect and embodiment as sites of love-based praxis, with attention to Ahmed’s (2014) demonstration of the ways in which emotional responses interact with divisive discourses of love to effectively impede loving practice (as we understand it). Embodied engagements with humans and other-than-human entities have the potential to transform one’s perception of reality, fostering empathy and a deeper connection to the world (TallBear, 2019).

Melinda: so, when i was looking at your poem, lida, and thinking about all the things that are moving through it, i started to realise that where i’ ve seen so much of this before is in poetry. poetry is such an untapped resource for knowledge creation in the traditional research sense.... we often leave it out, as though art is somehow different ... but the ways that it changes my thinking seem so relevant.... so, I started looking around, flipping through the pencil notes and annotations in the books on my shelves, looking for where the poets write about love, which, it turns out, is everywhere. one of the lines that really stuck and that i wanted to make sure made it into this piece is in Joy Harjo’ s Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings, in her evocation of the Blues. Harjo is a Muscogee poet speaking here to a tradition that flourished out of and against the abhorrent legacies of the transatlantic genocide. this genocide, of Africans forcibly removed from their continent, is often discussed together in US History conversations with the genocides of Indigenous people in the lands where those Africans were taken to, the same lands where I was born into a system that centers [sic; Melinda thinks and speaks in US-American

English] my whiteness at the expense of the descendants and survivors of those genocides. the blues, a genre which came to life on these lands, has played a powerful role in defining resistance to these structures according to alternative frameworks for love, especially by the early women singers of classic blues [Davis, 1998]. these women found new ways of speaking about a love that resisted the framework of enslavement that attempted to deny embodied agency to the women of their lineages and contemporary surroundings. Harjo mentions the flatted fifth, the pitch interval that gives the Blues its unique harmonic identity, a fragment of a modal landscape that enslaved Africans likely brought with them when White Europeans stole their lives from them and carried them across the Atlantic. the interval itself is a form of resistance. from that background of genocide and its resistances, to 'jump into a fierce understanding together' says to me that in the face of these unimaginable yet consistently imagined violences, there is some sense of 'together,' a together that honors [sic] without appropriating, that we should work towards.

lida: exactly. there are two things in what you say and what reading the parts of the poems make me think about, and the first one is that, how we have, in research, created this place where knowing through art doesn't matter so much. for me, if i want to engage in research lovingly, valuing all different kinds of knowing is really important, while recognising also how completely incomplete i am in knowing about ... anything, basically ... or anybody is for that matter. but, at the same time, all of our knowing, in different kinds of ways, is valuable, and i think that's important. and, then, the other thing is, related to the 'fierce understanding together,' i think, that in this neoliberal academia that we live in today, the 'together' is dismissed because everything is about the individual, how

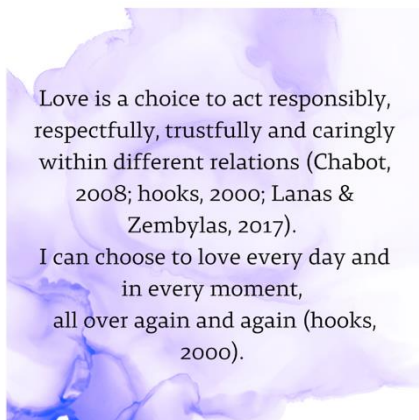
we need to be the best versions of ourselves, feel by ourselves and dwell in our own emotional mess instead of thinking about how we are, together. and that's something that really stuck with me when I started to read about love, and how people write about love, and especially how Black feminist and Indigenous scholars write about love ...

Melinda: ... and that pulls me right back to the first poem excerpt of this section. Gumbs concludes this fragment with 'everything was up for circulation again,' so ... what becomes possible when we move away from individualistic stances that mandate so much of the way that we're expected to engage in research?

lida: yeah, exactly.

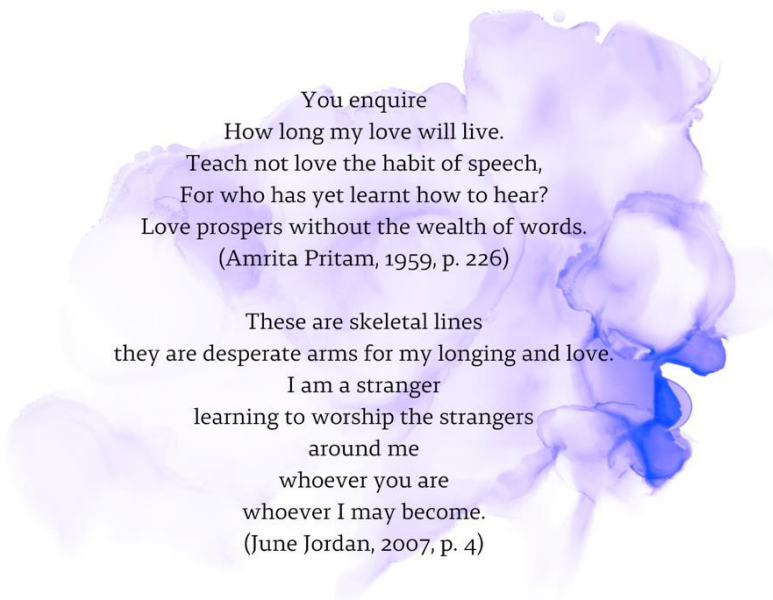
2

Love is a choice



Ethical research is a choice





You enquire
How long my love will live.
Teach not love the habit of speech,
For who has yet learnt how to hear?
Love prospers without the wealth of words.
(Amrita Pritam, 1959, p. 226)

These are skeletal lines
they are desperate arms for my longing and love.
I am a stranger
learning to worship the strangers
around me
whoever you are
whoever I may become.
(June Jordan, 2007, p. 4)

Love carries a choice of action, within and across different human and other-than-human relationships. Cultivating a loving space requires choosing to act with love over and over again and taking time to create an open and honest environment and a will to create shared knowledge of one another (hooks, 2000). In this conceptualisation of love we take inspiration from works of Indigenous scholars (e.g., TallBear, 2019; see also Grande, 2004/2015; Tuck, 2009; LaDuke, 2005; Smith, 1999) who emphasise being ‘in good relation.’ Being in good relation includes kinship feelings towards other human beings, but also towards other forms of life and the planet as a live entity. This concept of being in good relation may also be mirrored in the communal relations that Denise Ferreira da Silva (2014) models through the concept of ‘plenum,’ which she explains obliquely as follows: ‘In the Plenum, Refraction, as everything mirrors everything else in the “Play of Expression,” becomes the descriptor for Existence, as what exists becomes only and always a rendering of possibilities, which remain exposed in the horizon of Becoming’ (p. 91). This concept, framing a refusal of the [colonial] ‘World as we know it’ (p. 81), serves as lens to accompany Ferreira da Silva’s work to ‘expose how the Category of Blackness already carries the necessary tools for dismantling the existing strategies for knowing and opening the way for another figuring of existence without the grips of the tools of scientific reason’ (p. 82; see also Wynter, 2003). These diverse conceptions of entangled relationality suggested across these two decolonial origin points both serve to open up the potential of active interdependencies that are so often relegated to the (emotional) margins in Eurocentric knowledge paradigms. By choosing to approach love in terms of relation, our interdependencies come to the fore. We acknowledge both the

political implications of unequal access to choose loving practice within institutions, as well as the relational implications of the collaborative power of choosing love with whatever tools are available to us in any given moment.

lida: so, for me, this concept of 'love as a choice' was actually kind of groundbreaking, when thinking about love in practice – and i often struggled when i thought about love and how i was unable to love some people – when i read about love being a choice, an action, it changed everything. i was like, ok, i don' t have to have massive loving feelings towards somebody, but i can still choose to act lovingly towards every single person in my life. of course, i can' t do it all the time [Melinda giggles in agreement], but it gives me more freedom. and that was actually groundbreaking for me in understanding how to do research because then, again, i don' t have to feel love towards anybody, but i can still choose to act responsibly and respectfully and ... lovingly towards everybody, and to those whom i cite, and so on.

Melinda: so, how did that play out once you came to that realisation? what did that do to your research practice?

lida: ah ... good question! [both laugh]. I think basically, first of all, it made me think more about how i engage in different discussions and which discussions are the ones to be engaged in. in what ways do we choose to honour what others have said and in what way do we choose to respond to them? because when you think about love not only as a feeling but a choice of respectful actions, it makes it easier to make those choices, over and over again (and then realise, that maybe they were not the right ones and make other bad choices next ...) i think it also includes an element of forgiveness, so that when you do make the bad choices you can always make better ones next time. in the same way, the thing about working

with youth is they will always help you realise when you' ve made a bad choice, and, if you listen, they will help you make a better one next time.

Melinda: yeah, what that makes me think about is the choices that become possible when you begin to think about research in this way. what possibilities open up when you make this shift towards responsible choosing? here, in these excerpts (this relates, i promise), we have one poem that says, 'love prospers without the wealth of words.' i wouldn' t take that to say that love does not involve words (in fact, I' m thinking about so many traditions around the globe in which words have sacred power), but rather, what is there beyond the words, what is there that holds the words, what is there that allows the words to retain the sacredness that is often unspeakable? what are we choosing when we choose words in research?

lida: i' m glad you said that because it brought up the fact that, in the European framework of academia, there are so many ways we are expected to work and things we are expected to write, but then this kind of thinking about love as a choice and love as an ethical standpoint for research, this says that we actually have to be different or act differently than what the neoliberal European-centred academia is asking us to do. [Melinda interrupts with an enthusiastic 'indeed'] ... in that sense, it changes everything, completely.

Melinda: and that brings me back to what we' ve been working on in our introduction, just in terms of the citational conventions and politics that show up so often in this context. if we are going to choose to treat words as sacred, which i hope to do as much as possible, then, what does it mean to cite a concept according to conventions of naming an individual

author or a small group of authors ... and especially when you' re talking about a concept like love? in our field, we will be asked, 'Who said this?,' or told 'You need to cite this claim to be legitimate.' so then we throw a couple of names in, and everyone is satisfied, but what kind of damage have we done to this word, this deep word, by doing that? in our choices, can we push against some of those expectations? because it' s not just simply following a rule; entire worldviews are being communicated through that practice of citation that may be antithetical to what we are trying to do with those words.

lida: and that also goes back to who are we citing, and what kind of work are we citing. in neoliberal European academia, it seems it is not good enough to recognise other people' s works that are not considered academic. for example, if i write about political love and cite the Combahee River Collective, it may not be seen as legitimate enough for some academic journals, as that work was not originally published in (or for) a peer-reviewed journal. it had other purposes, outside of the neoliberal academy.

Melinda: 'legitimate' might just be another word for 'dominant' here. so, there' s a lot of work to be done and a lot of choices to be made to try to move against that tendency ...

3

Love is risk

As love is reciprocal, it is also risky.
When I open up to another,
I become vulnerable.
When I love, I will learn things about
myself in others that I may have
wished not to learn (hooks, 2000;
Nash, 2013).
It is then when love will hurt.
Love does not protect from harm or
emotions like fear or shame, but love
is a way to respond to those emotions
(Chabot, 2008; Lanas & Zembylas,
2015).

Ethical research is risk

As ethical research is reciprocal, it is
also risky. When I open up to another,
I become vulnerable.
When I do research ethically, I will
learn things about myself in others
that I may have wished not to learn.
It is then when ethical research will
hurt.
Ethical research does not protect from
harm or emotions like fear or shame,
but ethical research is a way to
respond to those emotions.

When I say home, I mean origin as a transitive verb.
When I say love, I mean these miracles are work.
(Zaina Alsous, 2019, p. 38)

And all I carried was this
tiny afflicted handful
of tenderness that trembled
like an infant within my flesh.
(Gabriela Mistral, 2006, p. 59)

bell hooks (2000) suggests that 'To open our hearts more fully to love's power and grace, we must dare to acknowledge how little we know of love in both theory and practice' (p. xxix). Later, she tells us, 'To know love we have to tell the truth to ourselves and to others' (p. 41). Gumbs (2020) tells us, 'It is dangerous to be discovered' (p. 16). In a world defined by the violent legacies of European

coloniality, the risk of loving emerges differently according to our inherited and practised habits of coloniality as they show up in our daily lives. Audre Lorde (1984/2007) tells us that ‘there are no new ideas still waiting in the wings to save us as women, as human. There are only old and forgotten ones, new combinations, extrapolations and recognitions from within us – along with the renewed courage to try them out’ (p. 38). In writing about writing (poetry, specifically), Lorde identifies both the risk and the necessity of moving our words towards the difficult contingencies of possibility. We believe the same risk and necessity apply to the writing of (ethical) research.

lida: this one was actually a fairly difficult one for me to grasp because it held a lot of the individual feelings of being hurt, and i was thinking, is that really part of what we want to say about love or not? having said that, when talking about love, taking risks basically means to be open to being hurt. and it is not only that you are open to being hurt, but it is linked to understanding how people, animals, things and relations are always incomplete. i think it is something that the concept of love also taught me, to accept the incompleteness, and when we openly allow this incompleteness to show in us, it makes us vulnerable. so, to love always entails a risk, but that’ s the risk that we need to take to work towards justice.

Melinda: indeed. something that i’ ve been thinking about a lot as i develop my orientation to research after many years in teaching is that this question of working towards justice never has a right answer (although there are plenty of wrong ones ...) ... oftentimes, the communities i’ ve worked in, which have generally been progressive organisations that are dominated by European-derived leadership models and US and European administrators and teachers, are grounded in multicultural ideas from the 90s, where we assume that, if we all just hold our hands and love each other, then all these problems of the world will disappear. yet, while working in those institutions, with fairly undefined

visions of love and change, we realise that the problems are still not only everywhere, but it gets even harder to talk about them because people are so attached to ideas they hold about themselves as 'good people working for justice.' it can be very scary to open yourself to the reality that your ideas exist in relationship with the other people you are working with; having worked through this and with this alongside so many students who were really more my teachers, i' ve seen and felt that pain emerge across different identities as people try to risk learning to see. and while the pain is real, regardless of who feels it, once again, the attention seems to go towards those already supported institutionally, while those structurally accustomed to not being supported continue to struggle to be heard. the status quo hates risk and works hard to avoid it. but if we are working towards justice, we will need to find a way to learn to see the privileges of those in dominance, together, in a way that might challenge our deeply felt perceptions of who we are. i really love how Mistral speaks to this in the fragment of her poem that we represent here; we don' t know what it is that we' re holding when we' re trying to work toward justice, but we know that it needs to come into being, and the risk for us is in working to bring the unknown forward.

lida: that actually reminded me of something that i was reading this morning as i was going through bell hooks' *all about love*. you were talking about how when we open up ourselves, and, when we try to be honest, it' s not always a happy thing to be honest. bell hooks [2000] said that 'yet even in the situation, the person who asks for honesty will often express annoyance when given a truthful response' (p. 47).

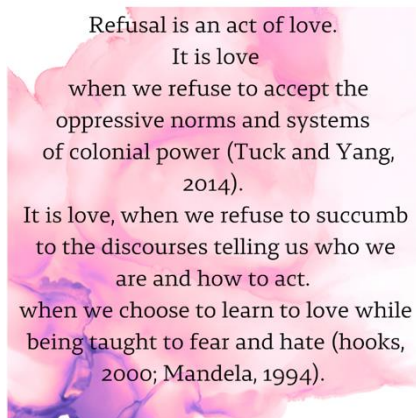
Melinda: so here we are practising this, nervous, with the question at the back of our minds, 'who are we even to write this piece?' and ... i guess we' ll find out....

lida: i want to read another quote: she also says that 'the heart of justice is truth telling, seeing ourselves the way it is, rather than the way we want it to be' (hooks, 2000, p. 33). i think that entails the risk we are talking about.

Melinda: that could be an anthem for this entire project.

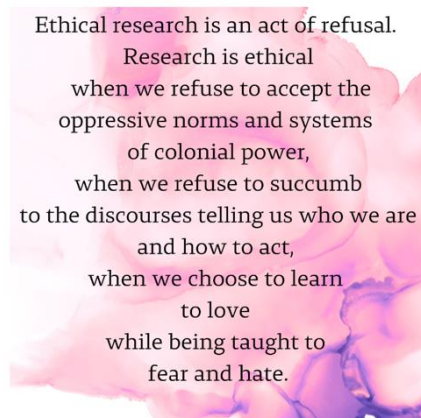
4

Love is refusal

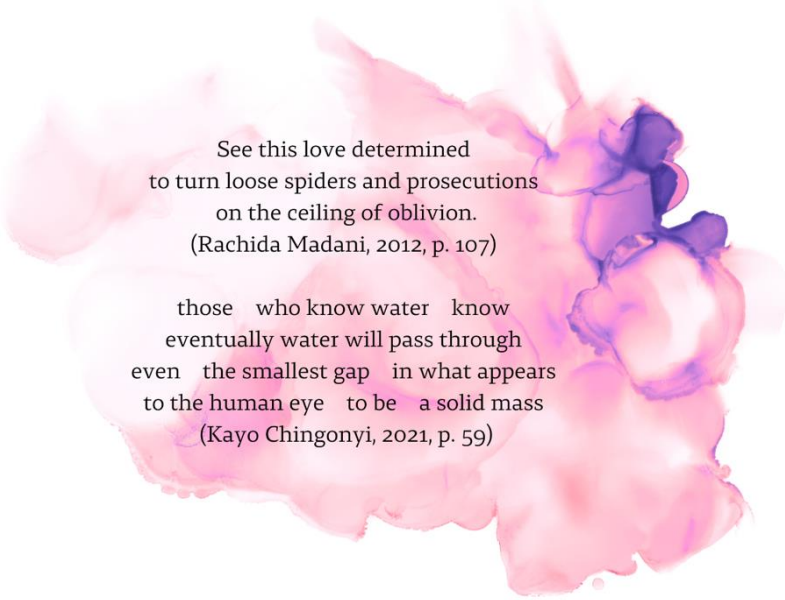


Refusal is an act of love.
It is love
when we refuse to accept the
oppressive norms and systems
of colonial power (Tuck and Yang,
2014).
It is love, when we refuse to succumb
to the discourses telling us who we
are and how to act.
when we choose to learn to love while
being taught to fear and hate (hooks,
2000; Mandela, 1994).

Ethical research is refusal



Ethical research is an act of refusal.
Research is ethical
when we refuse to accept the
oppressive norms and systems
of colonial power,
when we refuse to succumb
to the discourses telling us who we are
and how to act,
when we choose to learn
to love
while being taught to
fear and hate.



See this love determined
to turn loose spiders and prosecutions
on the ceiling of oblivion.
(Rachida Madani, 2012, p. 107)

those who know water know
eventually water will pass through
even the smallest gap in what appears
to the human eye to be a solid mass
(Kayo Chingonyi, 2021, p. 59)

Tuck and Yang (2014) discuss refusal in the context of performing research in a settler colonial paradigm. They suggest that refusal, and stances of refusal in research, can ‘place limits on conquest and the colonisation of knowledge by marking what is off limits, what is not up for grabs or discussion, what is sacred and what can’t be known’ (p. 225). Refusal guards against further exploitation, offering alternatives that open possibilities for more generative contributions. While Tuck and Yang discuss this sense of refusal as related to the specific exploitive practices of extracting pain narratives from Indigenous communities through settler colonial research assumptions and practices (p. 223), we also suggest that this orientation can light the way towards more of us resisting and reimagining hegemonic structures that adversely impact so many individuals and communities living within and on the margins of the neoliberal academy. Gumbs (2020), too, emphasises refusal as a practice in a section of *Undrowned* that ‘honours what it means to refuse to be seen, to be known, to participate when politics as we know them have prioritised recognition by and access to the dominant paradigm’ (p. 109). In line with this thinking, we embrace refusal in research as a loving practice.

Melinda: so, the guide poem that we framed the piece around is yours, but i wiggled this section in after having heard Eve Tuck speak at a conference in 2024. through that talk, i was exposed to her work in refusal in research, which i now understand as something that quite a few people

in the traditions of those we rely on here have also spoken to. for me, so much of what i feel like is necessary for a world to move towards justice will require refusing what i' m told is the way it is, over and over again.... i' ve never been comfortable with the idea that just because something is the way it is, we must keep doing it. it' s circular reasoning. i do acknowledge that sometimes our world is not framed in such a way that it feels like a choice, and choice is not equally available to everyone, but if we don' t try to imagine otherwise whenever we can, the realities that frame our current world will carry on as they are. in these traditions that are working not only against coloniality but imagining towards realities that don' t need the opposition to coloniality to define a future, dialectical concepts of resistance dissolve into something else.

lida: i totally agree, and i' m very happy that you wiggled this part in, because, actually, after reading especially Black feminist and Indigenous scholars' works on love, a lot of it is about refusing or refusal, and resisting, and how love is about resisting the oppression. we also quoted Nelson Mandela in the guide poem, how instead of hating what we are taught to hate and to fear (the way hooks talks about fear), instead of that we choose to learn to love, which includes refusing to be sucked into this general understanding of who is not good enough to do whatever, and again, who should we cite or what should we do. academia is full of all this kind of shit. all these hierarchies will exist anyway, whatever we do, but, somehow, if we can refuse to be put into that tiny box ... maybe we should ... that can really go into anything in life.

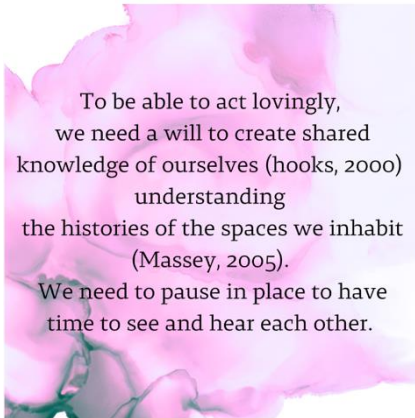
Melinda: indeed, and, if, in our current time, space and context, the stakes for refusal are not as high for us as they might be for someone else, or

even as high as they might be for us in a different time, place, or context, maybe that is another reason to risk the refusal.

5

Love is space-time

Ethical research is space-time



Some people say history moves in a spiral, not the line we
have come to expect. We travel through time in a circular
trajectory, our distance increasing from an epicenter only to
return again, one circle removed.
(Ocean Vuong, 2019, p. 27)

Beading a story
is like weaving,
a spiral, space making itself in the light
and colors pick up
what one loves on the needle
like a song.
(Elizabeth Woody, 2021, p. 109)

Our understanding of love as space-time is informed by ontologies that conceptualise space as relationally constituted, acknowledging human and other-than-human influences in reality's ongoing reconfiguration (Massey, 2005; TallBear, 2019; see also Ferreira da Silva, 2014). While these authors do not centre love as their main concept in the works cited, their understanding of space-time talks to us through love. Spaces congeal around the histories that constitute them and histories that are rendered salient through the relational *stories-so-far* inhabiting spaces (Massey, 2005). Alexander (2005) also suggests that 'The persistence of continuities ought to give us a great deal of pause about announcing the premature end to things, as in the end of history; the "post" of things, as in postcolonialism, for history proceeds in a way that makes ruptures neither clean nor final' (p. 93). Colonial legacies, when they frame specific standpoints and stories as universal and declare them *final*, continue to produce asymmetries of access to different spaces. This means that places may be differently accessible depending on positionality. This may result in different actors falling further away from each other and even being positioned as outside of the boundaries of a particular place. A kinship understanding as 'peoples in alliance with reciprocal responsibilities to one another and to our other-than-human relatives with whose land, water and animal bodies we are co-constituted' (TallBear, 2019, p. 36) is needed to allow spaces to be changed to enable us to inhabit stories-so-far with love, rather than with domination and exclusion.

lida: so, i came across this space-time concept while I was reading Doreen Massey's work for an article i was writing, and i actually kind of fell in love with Doreen Massey. her work about space and place also brought me to Kim TallBear, interestingly, although they draw from different kinds of histories and academic traditions. but they are connected when you think about what space actually is, how can different people attend to or access different spaces, and how do we perceive our relation to space and place. TallBear draws from Indigenous understandings of relational space and how we are all part of the world. she talks about the earth and nature and all creatures as kin, so like, the water is our kin and so forth. so that really changed the way i understand space. Massey also brings in an acknowledgement of how histories create spaces. and again, we are going back to power, how spaces inhabit different kinds of relational stories of power, and how that affects our opportunities to access

different spaces. so, time is very much entangled in space, and that was, also, in a way revolutionary for me, along with the understandings that TallBear' s and Massey' s writings brought me towards.

Melinda: i was thinking as you started talking that this concept of love we are working with here is one of the places where i think the Western inheritances are so fundamentally problematic in limiting our research potential because they rely on a worldview that abstracts the Subject from space and creates a sense of objectivity. (i don' t fundamentally believe that objectivity is a real concept – it' s used everywhere in research, but it' s so often used to disguise the subjectivity that places it into play). there' s a separateness of the researcher in that worldview, and our sense of time moves in one direction towards a specific, usually somewhat predetermined completion or conclusion. the more time i spend with, i want to say, Indigenous thought (but i want to be sure that I' m applying this label only as far as my White US-American consciousness will allow it in), the more i begin to grasp how linear time is not a universal, or even a very common, cosmology. if some of these other cosmologies were acknowledged more often within the neoliberal academy, much of what we are expected to do would be considered absurd, and that, i think, deserves much more attention than it gets.

lida: for me, i don' t know if i can continue with where you were going, but another thing that came to my mind that is not completely a continuation of what you said is, for me, when i was thinking about love and time in research, that also brought me to this idea of stopping. because the whole of academia is full of deadlines, and, at least in Finland, it feels like it' s bringing with it this narrative of having to do everything all the time, and being in a hurry, and being effective, and AI is

also bringing us this idea of needing to be more effective [at the mention of AI, Melinda rolls her eyes deeply and sighs], and i was just reading from my computer a suggestion that we should ‘use AI so you don’ t need to use so much time for this and this and this,’ but earlier we were talking about how, actually, to be able to think, you need time. you can’ t just go past that. and, in research, i think that’ s fundamentally important: when you are reading, when you are writing, you need to be able to pause, and breathe in, and be there with the book, with what you are writing, with your thoughts. it’ s also, absolutely, fundamentally important to do the same when you are with people, or animals, or whoever is participating in the research. if you can’ t do that, you can’ t do research ethically.

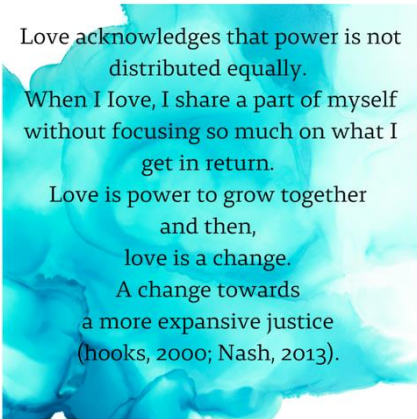
Melinda: i agree! and i also want to interject a delightful irony, where, just as we were talking about different perceptions of time you were like, ‘well, I don’ t know if this follows directly after what you said’ ...it just shows how deeply ingrained this sense of a linear process is in our understanding of what counts and what is valid, whereas i actually think that some of the value of this type of conversation is that it doesn’ t move in a straight line. so, you went somewhere else. why is that a problem? why is that not a gift, that something happened that was unexpected, that sparked a permutation that took us to a new place? so much of our research assumes that we will start with an introduction and end with a conclusion. what might be possible if we ... don’ t? what if we acknowledge that these things are never concluded? we’ re never done! the whole foundation is waiting to be shaken by the next thing! why conclude?

lida: i remember when i was just beginning the PhD, i was in a table with distinguished scholars, and i didn' t yet feel intimidated to say out loud what i thought (we live a different life now), but i said something like, 'I actually think that we can never find answers, but we can only refine the questions.' a lot of the distinguished scholars were like, 'I don' t think that' s really how it is.' and i tried to say, 'I think it is!'

Melinda: yeah, once you bind the question, you' ve lost so much of its potential.

6

Love is change

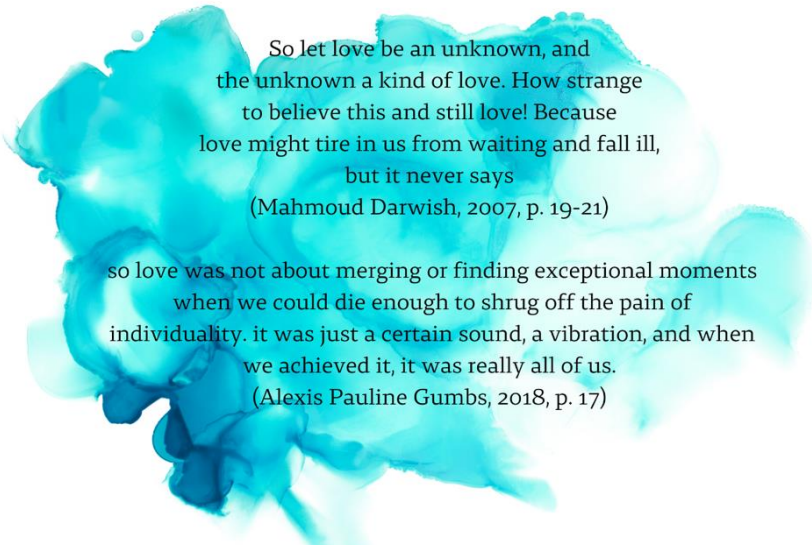


Love acknowledges that power is not distributed equally.
When I love, I share a part of myself without focusing so much on what I get in return.
Love is power to grow together and then, love is a change.
A change towards a more expansive justice (hooks, 2000; Nash, 2013).

Ethical research is change



Ethical research acknowledges that power is not distributed equally.
When I do research, I share a part of myself without focusing so much on what I get in return.
Research is power to grow together and then research is a change.
A change towards a more expansive justice.



So let love be an unknown, and
the unknown a kind of love. How strange
to believe this and still love! Because
love might tire in us from waiting and fall ill,
but it never says
(Mahmoud Darwish, 2007, p. 19-21)

so love was not about merging or finding exceptional moments
when we could die enough to shrug off the pain of
individuality. it was just a certain sound, a vibration, and when
we achieved it, it was really all of us.
(Alexis Pauline Gumbs, 2018, p. 17)

Love as change engages the concept as both a shared action and a participatory emotion, a positive requirement for transformation towards a more just society. As bell hooks (2000) claims: ‘There can be no love without justice’ (p. 19). Therefore, choosing to act lovingly also means demonstrating a willingness to strive towards more equal relationships in a more just community (Nash, 2013) and confronting the inequities that shape not only human relationships but also our connections with the earth (TallBear, 2019). Alexander (2005) calls on us to embrace change in an effort to move towards justice:

Above all, we need to learn how to practice justice, for it is through practice that we come to envision new modes of living and new modes of being that support these visions. Where do our visions for justice originate? How do we inhabit them? Clearly, our task is to transform inherited practices that stand in the way of justice. (p. 93)

While exploring the hidden presence of conflicting theories of change in practices of Participatory Action Research, Tuck (2009) identifies four vantage points through which research might change. These ‘epistemological shifts’ – sovereignty, contention, balance and relationship – each trouble how those words are used in Eurocentric paradigms, recognising that their Indigenous understandings constitute a dramatic paradigmatic undoing of contemporary research practices (p. 45). While Tuck’s definition of those words and their importance for her modelling of research ethics are beyond the scope of this article, we nevertheless want to draw attention to her commitment to ethically grounded epistemological shifts in research. With this orientation as a source of inspiration, we acknowledge that our work to unsettle Eurocentric epistemologies in the neoliberal academy will require similar attention to epistemological shifts. For us, an engagement with choice, power, risk, refusal

and the ways in which we constitute our practice in time, space and place can be critically and ethically reimagined through our understanding of love as praxis. We hope that justice, an entangled justice, is there, waiting for us, even if only in fragments, in the folds of this work.

lida: so, as we think about love as change, we thought it might be a good idea to talk a bit about why i even started doing research. it was basically that i was a teacher for migrant youth who had just arrived in Finland before starting the PhD work. my basic task, i suppose, was to teach these youth Finnish, but that was kind of what came up after all the other stuff that we did. many of my students were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and youth. they arrived in Finland without their parents, and most without any family, and the way they were treated in Finland was just appalling. i remember when i started doing that work, i was so angry towards the whole of Finland because the youth were treated that way. these kids were kids, and they talked about how they were not being treated as humans. instead, they were treated as numbers, or just as material, i suppose. then, when my contract was about to end, i was like, ok, fuck this shit, i want to at least try to do something to change this, or at least to bring these issues into the awareness of people living in Finland, because this is not how you treat youth who are here, basically by themselves. so, that' s why i started doing research with unaccompanied asylum-seeking youth or those who had once been seeking asylum.

Melinda: i had a not dissimilar set of experiences, interestingly enough, on a continent across the Atlantic. i worked in several boarding schools in the USA that were focused on some kind of progressive vision, arts schools and international schools with missions of peace and change. in all of them, i found a lot of inconsistency between the visions that were being put forth by these institutions and the practices, often unconscious

practices, the realities these students faced. the life experiences and needs of so many of my students were often not accommodated by institutional policies and practices invented by adults enmeshed in systems of dominance. over and over again, i found that our students were being underserved and treated as though they were not fully human. even in these places, oriented explicitly towards change and justice, the patterns and the practices were holding us back from the goals we claimed. so, i guess my own interest in this research came out of an interest in speaking about these things to different audiences than the students in my classrooms, who already knew these things, organically. that' s not to say better audiences, or more influential audiences; people continue to work every day in these school contexts where they are actively practising love the way we are talking about it here, resisting the systems that cause damage, trying to move us into a different kind of world. but, to me, it felt like research might be a way for me to address my work in another direction that needs it as well; research, as a part of the 'expertise' economy, is one of the spaces where justice gets stuck.

lida: this also reminded me of what we also discussed earlier, about what it means to be a professional. i don' t know how this relates to change, i hope in some way, but both of us have been told to not behave lovingly (perhaps not using that word), but meaning, 'You shouldn' t love these students. You should be more distant to be professional.' and, also, as i' ve been talking about my research to different professionals, for example, who deal with unaccompanied youth housing, and stuff like that, these professionals say, 'yeah, it' s lovely what you talk about, and it' s kind of sad to hear these stories, but love really can' t be part of our professional work.' and ... here comes the change ... i absolutely think that love definitely can be a part of being a professional, and, actually, i

think it should be part of being a professional in whatever position you hold.

Melinda: where that takes me is: change, in this world, is not optional; it is happening all around us. the world that we know now will be unrecognisable in fewer than a hundred years if we don' t stop doing what we are doing, and probably even if we try to. we are dealing with issues of mass migration already on a scale that is unprecedented in human history, and that will only increase. the way that we define our identities will not be sustainable with the changes that are coming. AI is a transformation on the level of at least the wheel and the printing press (i think we' re living in another one of those moments), the new coloniality of Big Tech superseding the older coloniality of European capitalism is something that we can' t seem to even wrap our heads around. in the face of all that change, if we want to move in the direction of justice, I believe it has to be centered [sic] in the kind of love we are trying to talk about here. fortunately, we have thousands of years of archives and stories from people who have been doing that work and can show us the way through it. we just need to ... (and, by we, I mean those of us captured in this neoliberal academy research-teaching context), we need to learn to see them, honour them, be inspired by them, make space with them in their fullness, and take space away from some of the habits that are limiting us.

lida: yeah, I think that Jennifer Nash, bell hooks and so many other Black scholars, have talked about love as justice. the words are equals. there is no justice without love, there is no love without justice. and going back to Kim TallBear and other Indigenous scholars ... you talked about natural disasters and how the whole world is probably going to collapse. but,

instead, if we (that same neoliberal, etc., 'we') could adopt even a tiny bit of that idea that the water and the earth and everything is kin, maybe ... maybe we could stand a chance.

Melinda: so, like Audre Lorde says, in her poem 'Equinox,' 'we must be very strong / and love each other / in order to go on living' (p. 174).

***Love is research.
Research is love.***



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