

Hand in hand: refusing research during a pandemic

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ABSTRACT

What does it mean to refuse research during a pandemic? The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to reckon with old wounds and underlying conditions, particularly the ways in which these extreme inequalities are circumvented in research. In addressing pandemic failures the article addresses the ways in which research is complicit and how research has been re-invented under the conditions of the pandemic yet is still under the logics of extractivism and in service of the neoliberal university. Using refusal and abolition as generative theoretical groundings, the article seeks radical alternatives to reclaiming research as practice. Through the retraditioning of knowledges through ancestry, spirituality and positionality we can start to reclaim research as practice. Thus, in our refusal to go back to 'normal', practicing research becomes the first step in organizing in anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-colonial and anti-racist ways.

KEYWORDS

Refusal; research; ethics; relationality; social justice

Our current collective circumstances require us to think about death, to grieve, and to consider that everything we have known has to change or come to an end.

Adrienne Maree Brown (2021, p. 50)

Unthinkable thoughts¹

What are your unthinkable thoughts? You know, the ones that keep you up at night, that squeeze in your chest, that keep you sleepless, unable to rest, unable to focus, that long walks will not chase away, that make your body feel heavy, that keep your breath shallow, that race through your mind, that won't allow you to be here in the present moment, that won't allow you to show up for yourself let alone others; those unthinkable thoughts.

In a forest

that has been

log-ged for 500 years

the last tree

standing

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was given
 pencil and paper
 and told
 to tell their story

Writing this to you now, I² write with discomfort, as I sit with and try to hold with compassion and kindness one of my unthinkable thoughts. That the anger, frustration and impatience stemming from pain and fear, will destroy the very path I'm trying to make to you. That as an imperfect women of colour vitriol can seep into my words, such that my actions become divisible from our abolitionist dreams, for I know that the words trapped here in this paper will far outlive this pain and anger.

So, I am choosing to share with you the hesitation in writing, to reveal that our choices need not be shrouded in edited versions saved in unmarked folders, but can rather be used as a pedagogical tool to mark absences but not be defined by them. Below is the first attempt to write this article, a paragraph that I reluctantly show you, a paragraph rewritten three times in one week, each time sharpening the blade.³

Each time I sit to write academically, I have to perform an exorcism of the 'authoritative I' (Vázquez, 2020, xxv). It is an initial process of purging the remnants of the modern individual subject we are trained to become from pre-school, which we 'master' in university (see Sheik, 2020). This 'authoritative I' is sharp, witty, callous, vengeful and adept in the art of critiquing and is quick to weaponize 'call-outs' in claiming punitive justice. As Adrienne Maree Brown points out in *We Will Not Cancel Us And Other Dreams of Transformative Justice*, 'Call outs elicit both a consistent negative and dismissive energy, and a pleasurable take-down activation, regardless of what the call out is addressing' (2021, p. 42). I refuse. I refuse to fall prey to the 'authoritative I', I refuse performing the prophetic intellectual (Motta, 2016), I refuse being held captive by pain and fear, I refuse us vs them. I refuse, for in this meditation on the discomfort felt while writing the strikethrough paragraph above, it has become clear that claims made by the individual 'authoritative I' seeking punitive justice, is devoid of liberation.

Instead, I draw from the deep well of a 'coalitional ancestry' (Garcia, 2020) which has long used storytelling as a means of 'affirmative decolonising critique' (Motta, 2016, p. 42). Writing from the position of storyteller allows for the voice of those historically denied a knowing-subjectivity to be onto-epistemologically expressed beyond the logics of enunciation, representation and punitive justice (Vázquez, 2020). It is a positioning that allows us to 'move away from such patriarchal and racist enactments of masculinity towards a caring and nurturing self who is able to participate in, and contribute to the building of community' (Motta, 2016, p. 41) and abolitionist futures. With this in mind, I would like to turn our attention to the COVID-19 pandemic and the untenable situation we currently find ourselves in.

Pandemic failures

Call outs have a long history as a brilliant strategy for marginalized people to stand up to those with power. Call outs have been a way to bring collective pressure to bear on corporations, institutions, and abusers on behalf of individuals or oppressed peoples who cannot stop the injustice and get accountability on their own. There are those out of alignment with life, consent, dignity, and humanity who will only stop when a light is shined onto their inhumane behaviour (Brown, 2021, p. 60).

Early in the pandemic, COVID-19 was touted as ‘the great equalizer’, a myth which many subsequently debunked (see Girvan et al., 2020; Mukhtar, 2021). If anything, the pandemic has created a ‘captive audience’ forced to reckon with old wounds and underlying conditions which created the perfect host for a virus like COVID-19; evidenced by the social unrest in South Africa, Latin America’s Green Wave, Myanmar’s Spring Revolution, Black Lives Matter in the US, Farmers Protest in India, Thailand Protest Movement, Strajk kobiet (women’s strike) in Poland, Aurat March in Pakistan and Viajezapatista, to name a few. The glimmer of hope that came with the announcement of a vaccine in November 2020, was quickly doused as it became evident that this could not cure the ills of capitalism. We have witnessed ‘vaccine apartheid’ play out before our eyes, where as of April 2021 ‘10 countries account for approximately 75% of the COVID-19 vaccines administered worldwide. About 130 countries-accounting for about 2.5 billion people-are yet to administer a single dose’ (Thier, 2021). This pandemic has also brought into sharp focus the nefarious relations between university research and corporate interests, where a mere 20% of vaccine funding has come from pharmaceutical companies, the rest being publicly-funded (Thier, 2021). Yet, pharmaceutical companies have been allowed to fix prices at will (AstraZeneca price per dose – Uganda \$7, South Africa \$5.25 and the EU \$2.16), whilst the EU, UK, Japan, Canada, Australia and the US (only recently backtracking), continue to block attempts by South Africa and India to have patents for the vaccine temporarily lifted (Thier, 2021). This is at a time when India has recorded the world’s highest new infections in one day, 314 835; with mass cremations taking place in parking lots in Delhi (Siddiqui, 23 April 2021).

Whereas the argument above is important for drawing attention to Big Pharma and the role of nation states, which has been the subject of media attention, researchers and civil society, it falls short on two accounts. First, it has overshadowed and left unquestioned the complicity of research and the university in exacerbating these inequalities and exclusions. As an international institution, the university has two main functions teaching and research, both of which are geared towards societal impact. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, given the argument above, it is clear that in this regard it has failed. As a researcher in the social sciences, complicit in this system, it begs the question: if the university has failed to provide knowledge as a public good that could save lives, what else has it failed to do? This leads to the second shortfall of the argument above, that by its very formulation highlights the limitations of such research, ‘[F]or the masters tools will never dismantle the masters house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change’ (Lorde, 1979/2017, p. 19). This brings us to another unthinkable thought, one which I have sat with for the past six years as I try to complete my PhD. *Research is the problem.*

Research, refusal and abolition

In *Epistemic Freedom in Africa* Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, p. 161) makes clear that the modern Westernized university was pivotal in inventing and universalizing a Eurocentric approach to knowledge through ‘genocides, ontocides, epistemicides, culturecides, and linguicides’. These logics have been sustained through accumulation, the circulation of capital, expropriation of labour and the non-circulation of wages (Boggs, 2019, p. 18). Indeed, Xochitl Leyva Solano (2019, p. 49), reiterates this by showing how the grammar of ‘producing knowledges’ provides the structure for ‘academic capitalism’, where knowledge is an extractable commodity, in ‘a chain of production where ‘knowledges’ are produced, distributed, and consumed first and foremost for the reproduction of the academic machinery and then for profit of various industries’ (see also Rutazibwa, 2019;

Suárez-Krabbe, 2015). In addition, Indigenous scholars have long pointed out the ways in which research has been and continues to be complicit in dehumanizing and ethically unjust practices:

From the vantage point of the colonized, a position from which I write, and choose to privilege, the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. (*Decolonizing Methodologies* – Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 1)

The ethical standards of the academic industrial complex are a recent development, and like so many post-civil rights reforms, do not always do enough to ensure that social science research is deeply ethical, meaningful, or useful for the individual or community being researched. Social science often works to collect stories of pain and humiliation in the lives of those being researched for commodification. (*R- Words: Refusing Research* – Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 223)

There is an increasing emphasis on the need to sensitize researchers and students to diverse epistemologies, methods, and methodologies, especially those of women, minority groups, former colonized societies, indigenous people, historically oppressed communities, economically oppressed groups, and people with disabilities, who have been excluded from dominant epistemologies (*Indigenous Research Methodologies* – Bagele Chilisa, 2012, p. 14)

Nevertheless, during the COVID-19 pandemic a plethora of research methodologies emerged under the guise of efficiency and 'business as usual' with the purpose of remotely gaining access to already vulnerable and marginalized communities. As early as March 2020, when we were still in the early stages of the pandemic, resources began circulating online including crowd-sourced documents *Doing Fieldwork in a Pandemic* (Lupton, 2020) and LSE Digital Ethnography Collective Reading List (2020), *Breaking Methods*, a Youtube channel (2020), *Rapid Ethnography* (Sangaramoorthy & Kroeger, 2020), and *Patchwork Ethnography* (Günel et al., 2020).

As social science researchers, cognizant of our complicity, we need to ask ourselves is this the pivot we need to be taking? As painful as the pandemic has been, we find ourselves on the cusp of significant social change brought on by the previously mentioned social movements that have called out oppressive systems and demanded transformative justice. Some ripples of these movements have been felt in academia at the managerial level with increased attention on representation, diversity and inclusion, decolonizing the university and addressing racism, yet how these translate in terms of ethical research and research practices remain shallow at best and performative at worst. Looking over our shoulder at the ways in which we have been doing research, collectively taking stock of where we are in the present moment, as we look to the future, we find ourselves in the unique position of choosing differently. Of refusing.

Refusal is understood here as a practice stemming from black and indigenous communities, where more than just a no, it is seen as

a rejection of the status quo as livable and the creation of possibility in the face of negation i.e. a refusal to recognize a system that renders you fundamentally illegible and unintelligible; the decision to reject the terms of diminished subjecthood with which one is presented, using negation as a generative and creative source of disorderly power to embrace the possibility of living otherwise. (Campt, 2019, p. 83)

In the context of the university, research as refusal is a useful practice in pushing back against the tirade of conservative and populist regimes who have from Brazil, to the US, UK, Poland Hungary and India sought to silence and thwart social and transformative justice aims seeking to redress historical oppressions along race, gender, sexuality, disability and class lines.

By practicing refusal and using our complicity in the university as an entry point, we start to open up space not only to challenge the extreme inequalities, logics of extractivism and

accumulation within research practice, the university and society; but to also create the possibilities for radical alternatives. Put another way, ‘Refusal in research makes way for other r-words - for resistance, reclaiming, recovery, reciprocity, repatriation, regeneration’ (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 244). Importantly, refusal creates space for relationality, for thinking-sensing-feeling our collective abolitionist liberation. Following Fred Moten and Harney and Moten (2013), abolition not so much of the university or research, but the abolition of a society, including institutions and institutional practices where knowledge can be weaponized for profit at the expense of people’s lives, the lives of all beings on this earth and the life of earth itself. ‘T[t]herefore not abolition as the elimination of anything, but abolition as the founding of a new society’ (Harney & Moten, 2013, 42). The generative and expansive qualities of refusal allow us to imagine this founding in the present, to till the soil, in preparation for planting our seedling hopes and budding dreams for a future in which we can live an ethical life in harmony with each other, all living beings, the non-living (ancestors) and Mother Earth.

Yet, how do we practice this whilst still under the strangle hold of modernity/coloniality⁴ and the western university? As Brown (2021, p. 42) rightly reminds us

we are in the very infantile stages of learning how to be in transformative justice practices with each other, to be abolitionist in real time, because we are still beginning, but the crises are so big, urgent, and constant that there is some leapfrogging, rushing ahead of ourselves, ahead of understanding a clear shared framework, clear distinctions.

In other words, in our struggle to reclaim research and to not cause further harm, how do we hold ourselves and others accountable in loving and compassionate ways? We need to begin with our relationship to research, with knowledge, with disciplines (Sheik, 2022) and with ideas.

Reclaiming research

In her article ‘Can a Methodology Subvert the Logics of its Principal’, Nokuthula Hlabangane (2018) points out the non-existence of space within the university for those on the opposite side of the colonial divide to have a conversation where onto-epistemological differences are treated with equal respect. In answering the question posed in her title, Hlabangane goes on to explain the ‘epistemic closure’ brought on by methodologies aimed at equilibrium, which includes positivist, post-positivist and interpretivist paradigms (Hlabangane, 2018). These western-based research paradigms fall short of collective liberatory praxis on two accounts, the first that knowledge is an individual pursuit and second its focus on prediction, control, stability and certainty (see Hlabangane, 2018; Wilson, 2008). ‘The ideal of a value-free social science is thus a myth’ (Hlabangane, 2018, p. 670). It is exactly these kinds of myths which Olivia Rutazibwa (2019) encourages us to demythologize⁵ in our attempts to decolonize. Indeed, in our efforts to *reclaim research as a practice* which is anti-colonial, anti-racist, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and non-anthropocentric we need to begin by dispelling the myths regarding knowledges. The pursuit of knowledge is not and has never been limited to the western university.⁶ Other ‘traditions of knowledges’ have and continue to exist on the outside of modernity/coloniality despite attempts at epistemicide, erasure and silencing. These knowledges continue to circulate around us through oral tradition, folktales, songs, dance, storytelling, ceremonies, rituals, recipes, customs, beliefs, practices and lore. It is in the reclaiming of these knowledges through ancestry, spirituality and positionality that we can start to reclaim research as a practice. In doing so we need to return to tradition, to those practices of spirituality, of deep connection and relation, deemed heathen, backwards and savage by

modernity's gaze. At this junction it is important to make a distinction between spirituality and religion. Following Wilson's (2008, pp. 90–91) reading of Cascio (1998) who,

... discusses spirituality as something that is personal and individual, whereas religion is a social exercise. I would take this one step further and say that spirituality is one's internal sense of connection to the universe. This may include one's personal connection to a higher being, or humanity, or the environment. I would say that religion is (or at least, should be) the external manifestation of spirituality. People from within the same religion may share a similar set of beliefs about spirituality, but these beliefs can neither be assumed to be universal nor exclusive.

In other words, in order to onto-epistemologically exist whilst practicing research we need to return to our connection and relation with the cosmos. This path of reconnection will be different for each of us, depending on the ancestral lineages from which we descend, the lands of our birth, and the living or non-living teachers who find us. This retraditioning of our research practice is what allows us to decolonially position ourselves, to allow for unlearning, relearning, thinking-sensing-feeling; so that we do not become entrapped by modernity/coloniality's snares of representation, inclusion, appropriation, validation and sovereignty; it gives us deep connection to ourselves, each other, all beings (living and non-living) and provides us with a horizon - the places where our abolitionist dreams are born, so that we can reclaim research as a practice of coming into relation (see Wilson, 2008).

From method to practices

Manja, jeera, dhanya, masala, garam masala, elachi, dhanya, methi. These are spices I use every day. These spices which were carried by my indentured ancestors across oceans, their seeds kept dry from the licking waves. Ma used these spices to cook dekhs on an open wood flame for kathams, weddings and janazahs, a tradition now passed on to my uncle. Nani used these spices to cook offerings for the dead during kavady, navrathri, Deepavali and for the living on birthdays, Christmas and New Year. My mother, like her mother, and her mother's mother before her, performed magic with these spices. I never saw them look at a recipe, measure or set a timer, with multiple pots going at the same time, the process was habitual and instinctual. My mother's hand turning roti's on the hot tawa, her index finger used to measure spices. When I moved to the Netherlands to start my PhD, she gave me Zuleikha Mayat's 'Indian Delights'⁷ as a gift. I remember looking at this new shiny red book, and recalling my mother's copy with the back and front cover missing, brown and yellowing pages held together by string binding, sections scattered like horcruxes across the house. At my first visit home my aunt asked me if I was cooking for myself and I said yes, but it doesn't taste the same, to which she responded 'mother's hand is missing'. I realized my mother had studied this book, and with each practice of a recipe, her hands remembered and she needed the book less. My copy now has post-it notes with handwritten additions and adjustments which my Mum patiently talked me through over the phone. Even though Ma, Nani and Mum used exactly the same ingredients and spices, each of their curries has a distinct taste, as does mine, my sister's and my brother's. It's in the hand.

Method with its aim of 'finding out about' through rigour, validity and triangulation has become rigid, continuously seeking out prediction, control, stability and certainty (see Hlabangane, 2018; Wilson, 2008). In doing so it forecloses on the possibility of intuition, kismet and non-material wisdom. As Franz Fanon (1952/1967, p. 12) aptly pointed out '[T]here is a point in which methods devour themselves'. In contrast *practicing* encourages 'learning from' through relation, reciprocity and accountability (Kimmerer, 2013; Wilson, 2008). Here the emphasis is on doing, as repeated, as process and praxis that, may over time become habitual and instinctive, but is never complete, never 'perfected'; where the learning process is generational and open-ended; we can never know all there is to know and that is alright. Using practices in the research process then becomes about holding ourselves accountable to the relationships we have built, be that to a person, peoples,

community, land, sea, sky, rivers, mountains, the cosmos. These relations are held together by reciprocity, a position of sharing, gratitude and humility (Kimmerer, 2013).

Tamarind, mustard seeds, black pepper, jeera, red chillies, garlic, tomatoes, onion, oil, water, salt. In June 2020 I facilitated two guest sessions on Refusal in the Transitions to Social Justice LAB led by Rosalba Icaza. The previous year Rosalba and I, together with two consultants from our university's research-training-advice (RISBO) department, designed the course activities. The entire course, with interactive pedagogical tools, was designed for in-person classes. With the swift change to online-classes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, we discussed whether to cancel the course due to all the uncertainty, but instead decided to keep the course running as a space to support each other and create community amongst the predominantly international student cohort, who were increasingly isolated and far from their families and loved ones. A few days before the first session, I came down with a cold and had a very sore throat and ear ache. As this was in the initial phase of COVID-19 widespread testing wasn't available and only those who were seriously ill were being tested. At the start of the session, I told the students I was still recovering, and was feeling better thanks to russo (rasam, russam), a soup my Mum and Nani made whenever we had a cold. A student from India unmuted himself to share the Indian roots of russo, which was also made in his household. A while later, during the open discussion segment, before commenting a student from Colombia, apologized for her voice as she also had a sore throat. To which the Indian student offered to make her russo and deliver it to her dorm. When I messaged to check up on her a few days later, she said she was feeling better and that the russo had really helped to soothe her throat. And I thought it's in the hand.

Hand in Hand is an exercise developed in the context of the 2020 Transitions to Social Justice Lab led by Rosalba Icaza at the International Institute of Social Studies. Without, first explaining the exercise in detail, I would like to invite you to do the practice along with me, as a way of building relations between us. You will need:

- A blank sheet of paper
- Art supplies: coloured pens / crayons / coloured pencils / markers
- 5–10 min

Take a moment to look at your hands, perhaps they're curled over the edges of the hard copy you are holding, or maybe like me, they are resting on your keyboard as you look at the screen. Take a look at your fingers, did you know that fingers don't have muscles, rather the muscles that allow your fingers to move are located in the palm and mid-forearm, linked to the fingers by tendons. Hands are amazing. Gaze over the wrinkles made by time, the deep valleys between your fingers, notice any scars, or birth marks. Look for a moment, lovingly at your hands, as if you are seeing them for the first time, remembering how well they have served you, perhaps by breaking a fall, holding on for balance, raising food to your mouth, curling around warm cups of tea, touching, hugging, feeling, caressing, squeezing, scratching, clicking, clasping, clapping.

1. Now place your hand with the fingers stretched apart on the blank piece of paper, take a pen or pencil in your dominant hand and start to draw the outline of your hand, starting from the base of the wrist, moving along the fingers and ending at the outer edge of the wrist.
2. Whilst reflecting on the ideas of refusal, abolition and transformative justice write down or draw at least 5 ethics/morals/values that show how you relate to the worlds around you. These may have been learned at home, in your family or in other communities you are a part of. Don't think too hard about it, simply write down the words/ideas/symbols that arise.
3. Take the last few minutes to free draw onto your hand, anything else that you feel is important and worthy of remembering.

4. Turn to the appendix and compare your hand to mine. Notice the paths where we find common ground.
5. Take a deep breath and know you are not alone in this struggle. We are always together and hopefully one day we can have a conversation about what's in our hands.

Hand in hand: practicing relational ethics and accountability

This practice was inspired by 'Body Mapping'⁸ the arts-based therapy method borne during another moment of crisis – the HIV/AIDS pandemic in post-apartheid South Africa. Body mapping uses life-size body drawings to encourage participants to use visuals, words and imagery to narrate their life journey's. The method itself is widely written about (see Devine, 2008; Gunn, 2017) and there is no denying its usefulness, yet it remains a method very much focused on the healing of the individual. As a methodology it has come to be used by NGOs and civil society organizations as a tool of advocacy and evaluation.

Hand in Hand is a practice grounded in the pedagogies of positionality, relationality and re-existence (Vázquez, 2020). Positionality being the basis of our knowledge claims; not merely our identities, but rather our positioning along the colonial difference and groundings in relation to others and the life of earth. This leads to relationality, as the move away from dominant forms of subjectivity under modernity and 'the logic of representation and its subject/object dualism' and towards re-existence where we start to see our being/becoming as relational to others and all life, where we can begin to heal together, rejoice in our in-completeness and forge pathways beyond resistance and struggle (Vázquez, 2020, p. 172). Hand in hand is a practice of reaching out for relations, of seeking deep connection across difference in a move towards coalition (Lugones, 2010). It is an exercise used to build relations by getting creative with our differences (Lorde, 1979/2017).

The full potential of the exercise comes through when it is practiced in groups, for example students or any other group coming together for the first time, collectives, social movements, etc. Below I provide some guidelines for facilitating the practice with groups, though keep in mind this is *not* a method, so feel free to add your own 'hand' to it.

Step 1: 3–5minute mindfulness exercise (body scan meditation or breath work) or any other exercise which encourages developing a safe space

Step 2: 15–20 min for drawing the hand, writing morals/ethics/values and free draw (the facilitator also draws during this time)

Step 3: 20–30 min for discussion, the timing depends on the size of the group. In planning your session leave the maximum amount of time for the discussion.

Step 4: Start by showing your hand drawing and starting the discussion by describing one of the words in your hand.

Step 5: Then ask the group if anyone has the same word and would like to share. After this person has shared, ask them to tell the group about another word in their hand.

Step 6: Now ask the group if anyone else had this word and would like to share. After the next person shares, ask them to tell the group about another word in their hand.

Step 7: Repeat step 5 & 6 for the duration of the discussion time. Whilst noting down all the words mentioned, as well as any significant phrases. If there is any lull in the discussion you can always turn to your own drawing to get the discussion flowing again.

Step 8: 5–10 min for wrap-up, where you discuss the outcome of the relations you have built, this can be in the form of relational ethical guidelines, rules of engagement, a statement of relational ethics, a mission statement, a manifesto, vision, etc.

Step 9: The facilitator, a volunteer or group of volunteers are assigned the role of drafting the document.

Step 10: Close the session with a guided meditation or breath work.

Follow-up:

Step 11: The document is sent around to all participants (google docs works well) for additions, comment and clarification.

Step 12: Once the final document is ready it can be made public, as agreed upon by the group.

Hand in Hand is an exercise in which positionality and relationality harmonize, with all beings (living and non-living), the lands, seas, and sky, to Mother earth; to all those relations we hold ourselves accountable to (Wilson, 2008). It allows us to return to the earth, to community and to our shared responsibility. During the practice disagreements (conflict) *will* arise, these are indications of the colonial difference, which will be experienced as discomfort, unease and tension, it is importance that we hold this discomfort with patience and kindness, making friends with it as this is our ‘coalitional starting point ... the histories of resistance at the colonial difference are where we need to *dwell*, learning about each other’ (Lugones, 2010, p. 753). It is from this coalitional starting point that we can begin to ‘practice accountability beyond punishment with each other’ and to learn ‘how to handle conflict ... [and] ... move towards accountability in satisfying and collective ways’ (Brown, 2021, pp. 17–33). It will create opportunity and space for us to learn how to belong to each other, to reject the ‘authoritative I’, to listen deeply and to choose instead to soften, to hold each other with compassion and kindness first, it will give us solid ground to stand on as we struggle against the oppressions which seek to divide us on a daily basis.

These systems of oppression which aim to keep us apart through categories and hierarchies, has through the politics of scarcity, misled us into false corners, believing we only have two choices, struggle or assimilate. This is simply not true. I invite you to turn around and move into the vast open space that has always been there. That liminal space, with no corners, with space to breathe, outside of modernity/coloniality where time spirals, where subject-blends-object, where ‘I am because we are’ and where ‘duality is transcended ... in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts’ (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 80). *Hand in Hand* as a practice allows us to hold ourselves and each other accountable in loving and compassionate ways that do inflict the same violence we are against. It is a first step towards moving past the ‘infantile stages of learning how to be in transformative justice practices with each other’ (Brown, 2021, p. 42), so that we may belong to each other in coalition.

Our bodies breathe resistance. What’s in our hands

Our unthinkable thoughts are not something to be ashamed of, rather like refusal, they hold lessons for us, they give form to our discomfort and are generative in allowing us to see the disharmony within ourselves, our actions and in the world around us. The failures of this pandemic and the mass crises left in its wake, has shown us the urgency of abolition. In our refusal to go back to ‘normal’, we can begin abolitionist work right where we are, by reclaiming research as a practice. By

refusing to extract and expropriate from already vulnerable and marginalized peoples and communities we start to create space to question the institutions in our vicinity and start to organize in anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-colonial and anti-racist ways.

In the now famous *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House* Audre Lorde (1979/2017, p. 17) asks the question 'What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy?', she goes on to answer 'It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable'. *Hand in Hand* is an exercise which transcends perimeters, by encouraging us to become creative with our differences, to come into relation and into community. It is a practice that embraces the discomfort of dismantling, so that we may sink our hands into the rich dark soil beneath the Master's house and plant our seeds of hope and courage.

Notes

1. Inspired by the Adrienne Maree Brown's 2020 blogpost 'unthinkable thoughts: call out culture in the age of covid-19, a revised version can be found in her book *We Will Not Cancel Us And Other Dreams of Transformative Justice* (2021).
2. 'I' is used in this text, not as the singular, first-person, modern subject, but rather as a marker of the plurality of selves (Lugones, 2003, p. 724) that acknowledges interdependence as the freedom that allows 'the I to be, not in order to be used, but in order to be creative' (Lorde 1979/2017, p. 17).
3. I use strikethrough here to transparently show process, so that these unfinished thoughts are not quoted, especially out of context.
4. Modernity/coloniality is a concept used to show the inseparability of the two terms. According to Anibal Quijano and later Walter Dignolo, coloniality is the darker side of modernity. See *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (Mignolo, 2011).
5. Part of a 3 step decolonial strategic framework: demythologize, desilence/unmute, anti-colonially decolonize (Rutazibwa, 2019, pp. 164–171).
6. See Sheik (2022) for a full discussion on how Western expansion through colonialism and imperialism resulted in the dominion over knowledge.
7. A book first published by Durban based Women's Cultural Group in 1961, and holds most of the South African-Indian recipes.
8. See artist Jane Soloman's work with apartheid survivors and later women living with HIV/AIDS. See also Jonathan Morgan's – Memory Box project.

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Appendix

