

FIGS

Feminist Intersectional Solidarity Group



FIGS Exec: Rosemary Collard, Brittany Davey, Ileana Diaz, Zoe Meletis, Kate Parizeau, Nasya Razavi

Chair's Column

By Zoe Meletis

Caveat: given my own heightened workload, I wrote this piece quickly (with a kid home from school beside me) because I wanted to reach out to FIGS and friends. I realize, however, that there is no way that I can do justice to the difficulties, pain, and suffering being felt by all of you and your extended networks of friends, family, and colleagues, in this current era. My apologies for this quick and dirty letter, and my solidarity to you with respect to the challenges you are facing. UPDATE: the release of this newsletter had to be delayed several times due to our over-burdened schedules and additional caregiving at home during this time. My family is currently wrapping up our third semi-isolation period. ALL of my immediate family members have individually been sick and tested for COVID-19 since March, 2020. Luckily, we have all been negative to date. I know that many FIGS members and friends have not been as lucky. And, I recognize that academic parents in Ontario and Quebec, among others, have been juggling work and home schooling for the last 8 weeks or so (in this round alone). LOUD SIGH. Many of us wonder how far we can all bend before we start to break...

First I want to state that I am a privileged white settler woman who is gainfully employed as an Associate Professor, with a male partner who is also lucky enough to retain a professional job during the current year. We have both mainly been working from home (in a house that we were

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fortunate enough to have the credit and down payment to buy, and that could hopefully be ours in 20 years...). Let me also say though, that I have worked since I was about 10, and only had one (undergraduate) term without a job. My father was an immigrant to this country in his twenties, and he was forced into early retirement in his fifties due to technological changes in his field, and Canada purchasing abroad rather than building at home. I have no doubt that this extreme stress and loss of livelihood contributed greatly to his early death. So, despite lack of direct exposure to employment uncertainty and income loss this year, I am aware that financial hardships are worsening out there, including among our academic ranks.

The move to online teaching at many institutions has added to the precarity of academic labour and other undesirable shifts (we have no doubt all heard about the course being delivered from beyond the grave...). Almost daily, I also reflect on how I would have hated graduate school if I had started it in the last year or so (students—I am so sorry that you are not getting the wonderful community and positive experiences that many of us look back on fondly, despite challenges).

In addition to recent and current income loss, reduced employment opportunities and a (heightened) lack of academic connectedness strike at the heart of who many of us are, because of how bound up we are in our work (or the work we wish we had). And this in addition to us working in a sphere where desirable, fulltime positions have been increasingly cut for decades, while student debt loads have been rising exponentially. Work matters to us. It is, for better or worse, strongly linked to our identities and our self-worth in this neoliberal world, as many human geographers and others have skilfully illustrated via research and publications. In academia, we are trained to understand ourselves in measures of productivity despite evidence for decades that this is a rotten and unkind way to operate that devalues the contributions of many and erects barriers that prevent those whose insights and membership we really need from joining us at all.

2020 (and now 2021) have been exceedingly difficult years for the world. We have seen violent white supremacist responses against peaceful Black activism in the US, we have seen women and others around the world fighting to prevent further slippage of rights (never mind those trying to gain basic human rights or expand upon rights), and we have seen an egomaniacal attempt at a coup in the US that was dripping with toxic masculinity.

If all of that wasn't enough, we are all experiencing different but linked new and strange existences in a global pandemic, moving in and out of various phases of lockdown, rising and falling through cycles of anxiety, and experiencing myriad threats to our health and wellbeing. And all of this is if we are "lucky" (privileged), and not among the 1000s dying from COVID-19 and its impacts everyday...

On top of all of this, we know that COVID-19 and its impacts have, like many other crises, most adversely impacted members of marginalized/underrepresented groups including women. For one, caregiving and social reproduction, still primarily female-associated domains have been supremely demanding this year, with women trying to feed and keep family and friends safe, while dealing with amplified work/family conflicts (to say the least), rising rates of domestic abuse, and more.

Scholars, governments and other organizations around the world have been working hard to record and reflect upon the gendered and racialized patterns of impacts of COVID-19, including in academia. Please find examples here:

- <https://genderequity.uoguelph.ca/gender-equity-time-covid-19>

And so, this is a year that many organizations, including FIGS, have correspondingly tried to stay somewhat connected with members, and to meet enough to be responsible, without additionally overburdening people when we are all struggling in some way (kudos to ACME journal for their messaging and strategies during this era as well).

This year **should** be a write off in many respects because we need to direct our energies elsewhere, especially since many of us have shifted to delivering emergency remote teaching, a very time consuming, demanding, and alienating adaptation.

I am extremely grateful that my own institution recently announced that our Professional Activities Reports are an option this year. It would have been near impossible for me to complete one on time and the process would have been both angering and depressing...

We will miss the luxuries some of us enjoyed in #beforetimes, like traveling to conferences, we know that not seeing each other at conferences makes sense this year. But, as we know it is particularly hard to face that loss when we most need access to academic communities of support and solidarity. Still, FIGS is grateful that the CAG will be held online this June, allowing us to meet virtually (better than nothing), to contribute a **full day of feminist programming** (thanks to Rosemary Collard and all participants), and to gather and listen to what will no doubt be a very timely and poignant **Suzanne Mackenzie Memorial Lecture** by **Dr. Beverley Mullings**. We will miss the coffees, drinks, in person laughs, rants and discussions, and oh--- the hugs. But, we will gather and persevere, as we tend to do....

At this year's CAG, we hope to see more diverse attendance, presenting, CAG and FIGS leadership, award winning, and organizing. But, we also know that exactly those we need the most are also those with the least resources to support their contribution now, representing even worse conditions that the usually hostile, gendered, and white supremacist atmosphere in academia. I hope this will be an opportunity for us to carve out time for some of the things we love about academia, but I also worry about those who will not be able to attend or choose not to because we have left them out in the cold.

All year, I have been worrying about the untenured careers of friends struggling to find the equivalent of two days worth of time for each day that actually

exists (in order to have enough time to get everything done), while dealing with heightened caregiving duties and unbending academic schedules and expectations. I have already learned of inspiring scholars leaving for other paid work by necessity and climate, not choice. I also stress about my students' and colleagues' mental and physical health as we endeavour to stay home or are forced out into the public, largely via underpaid work.

So, we'd love to "see" you at the CAG, and regional online meetings before that, as well at some virtual FIGS events we'll announce soon, but--- if you are not there, we get it and we support your absence. You are tired, you are worn out, you are overburdened and undervalued, and you likely have little energy left for any of this. To that end, we reach out here to say we know you're out there, we see you, and we are happy to help you step back into to such roles when you are ready. We hope that your organizations and other supports recognize you too, and that we don't lose too many of you from academia as this current era lays bare our cold, demanding, and inequitable academic culture in a raw and painful way.

It is not all pain, hurt, and shadows, however.

There are vaccines in our midst, and US inauguration let at least a few sunbeams in, creating an amazing stage for Amanda Gorman's much needed voice of reason, youthful optimism, and powerful call for true change.

Also, for me, the FIGS zine (please find it at our new CAG webpage) we made earlier this year and the responses we had to it were a reminder about the unconventional, fun, and community-oriented work we can do to support each other across academic lives. So, I vote for more of this—work that helps to balance out the warped messaging and expectations that we often feel constrained, maimed, or assaulted by in our everyday lives as feminist geographers.

Yours in service,

Zoe Meletis
Chair, FIGS

WHAT'S GETTING THE FIGS EXEC THROUGH?

MEDIA AND BOOKS

- Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead, by Olga Tokarczuk: <https://bit.ly/3jmsCSp>
- An eclectic and enlivening playlist of songs collected weekly by members of GEOG 603 Theory and Methods for Human Geographers, at SFU: <https://spoti.fi/39PaZHM>
- Shout out to geographer Katherine McKittrick's playlist of songs: <https://spoti.fi/3tvPeEK> featured in her new book, Dear Science and Other Stories (<https://www.dukeupress.edu/dear-science-and-other-stories>)
- The Harrowing, if there's anyone else out there who likes scripted/fiction podcasts: <https://apple.co/3oPdoGx>
- Kid-friendly - Raffi's song Black Lives Matter to Me: <https://bit.ly/2MwnvmQ>.
- The Great British Baking Show (on CBC GEM) and reruns of Schitt's Creek
- Feminist speculative fiction by Octavia Butler, N.K.Jemisin, Tomi Adeyemi, Nnedi Okorafor, Cheri Dimaline

MOVEMENT

- Any movement is good movement!
- Walking, stretching
- The Sweat Spot <https://www.instagram.com/thesweatspot/>
- Yoga with Adriene <https://bit.ly/2MXLA5R>
- Dancing to 80s super hits in the living room...
- Walking dogs and enjoying the landscapes around us.

FOOD

- <https://sallysbakingaddiction.com/>

CONNECTIONS

Both CAUT and CUFA BC issued statements in support of Catherine Nolin (UNBC Geography) and her colleague Grahame Russell (adjunct faculty member in UNBC Geography) after Springer Nature quashed their co-edited book "Canadian Mining in the Aftermath of Genocides in Guatemala." The statements focus on concern with threat to academic freedom & dissemination of research free from political or corporate pressure.

- CAUT: CAUT Council condemns publisher's reversal as violation of academic freedom: <https://www.caut.ca/latest/2020/12/caut-council-condemns-publishers-reversal-violation-academic-freedom>
- CUFA BC: <https://www.cufa.bc.ca/cufa-bc-supports-unbc-professors-condemns-publisher-for-cancelling-book-on-canadian-mining/>
- Global Development Primer Podcast Interview (Dr. Bob Huish, Dalhousie U): <https://anchor.fm/robert-huish/episodes/Mining-the-Truth-Why-a-Publisher-Buried-a-Book-Exposing-Human-Rights-abuses-by-Canadian-Mining-Companies-in-Guatemala-endah6>
- The Tyee (Andrew MacLeod): <https://thetyee.ca/News/2020/11/25/BC-Profes-Protest-Publisher-Dropping-Mining-Book/>

ANIMAL MEET & GREET



These are two bitches that are helping me to get me through: Baby Penny and OG Beagle Jayna. I think this photo expresses how we feel sometimes this year— we're being locked out/away from many of the people, activities, and things we love, with no control over the situation... (pet therapy helps though)- Zoe

EVENTS & UPDATES

VIRTUAL CAG 2021 ANNUAL MEETING

UNBC Geography is hosting the next *virtual* meeting of the Canadian Association of Geographers (CAG), 7-11 June 2021. The conference theme is "Embracing Connectivity: Coming Together and Moving Forward." Save the dates and watch for updates at: <https://www.cag-acg.ca/cag2021> We look forward to hosting this national meeting, offering virtual fieldtrips, and poster & paper sessions.

- Special session submission- February 12, 2021
- Individual paper/poster submission - March 26, 2021
- Last day to register - June 1, 2021

PS If you have extra time on your hands (I hear this is a version of the COVID-19 era for some), we are always looking for more FIGS Exec. members and we will be looking to change an almost full slate of the Exec. at our AGM at the CAG in June.

IMPORTANT REMINDER:

Please watch for the 2021 announcement this spring about the FIGS Student Paper Contest. We will accept undergraduate and graduate papers from 2020 or 2021, given the current climate/year.

The 2020 winner, in case you missed the postings:

Congratulations to Bryanne Lamoureux for being the 2020 FIGS Student Paper Award winner (undergraduate). The winning paper is titled *Choosing Childlessness in a Time of Climate Crisis: Redefining Chrononormativity*. Bridging the personal with the academic, Bryanne explores questions of gender, happiness, social reproduction, bodily freedom, and agency in a time of climate crisis. The paper was adapted from a submission for the course *Sex, Gender, Space and Place*, taught by Allison Norris, at the University of Winnipeg.

GRADUATE STUDENT READING AND DISCUSSION GROUP

What: To craft solidarity and allyship amongst a collective of graduate students by discussing intersectional feminist issues and ways to build, inspire, and support one another during our stays in the academy.

Who: Geography graduate students + allies interested in developing a community of feminist geographers.

When: **Wednesday February 24th, 2021** / the last Wednesday of each month @ **7PM ET**

Where: Zoom

Prior to our first gathering, please complete the following survey and registration:

<https://forms.gle/PjSH8iY3aLk7jgYo9>

The survey and suggested reading *A Feminist Coven in the University* offer a starting point for our first meeting where we can begin to set shared objectives that support the temporality of our experiences with the intent to facilitate a connected space that empowers us during our stays in the academy.

Suggested reading: Smyth, A., Linz, J., & Hudson, L. (2019) *A feminist coven in the university*. *Gender, Place & Culture*, DOI: [10.1080/0966369X.2019.1681367](https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2019.1681367).

GEOGRAPHERS LOST

We mourn the loss of two valuable woman geographers who have left this world in 2021: Lynn Staeheli and Josephine Meeker. You will be missed.

HAPPY BLACK HISTORY MONTH

We also wish you a Happy Black History Month, and recommend engaging with some of the amazing resources and organizations out there for learning more about Black History in Canada. Two Western resources:

- <https://equity.ubc.ca/news-and-stories/celebrate-bhm/>
- <https://www.hogansalleysociety.org/>