THE FEMINIST CLASSROOM IN A NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the meaning of feminist classrooms as safe spaces is the context of rising fascism and ultra nationalist political parties across the globe. Focussing on the United Kingdom, I examine how safe space and care are mobilised by students to make sense of hostile contexts in which marginalised students and racially othered staff are further ostracised in neoliberal universities. I argue against simplified conceptualisations of collaboration and care in the feminist classroom emphasizing the distinction between feminist ethics and the broader resistance to power that is subverted by university hierarchies. I underscore how discourses on care and safety reproduce racialised and gendered expectations on staff in neoliberal universities without reciprocity which is implicit in praxis of care. I argue for brave spaces as a useful way to understand the dual task of education and challenging power in feminist classrooms whilst placing responsibility for interactions that centre personhood at the heart of the classroom. I argue that framing classrooms as brave spaces within the current political climate offers an opportunity to turn what are often difficult and sometimes tenuous conversations about the coherence between feminist ethos within the neoliberal university into transformative conversations about the nature and demands of the feminist classrooms.

KEY WORDS

Feminist classroom, neoliberalism, safe spaces, collective care, higher education

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, there has been a proliferation of work in the higher education sector that explores questions of feminist pedagogy on the one hand and those that pay attention to the

racialised and gendered experiences of women in the European and North American academy on the other hand (See Bhopal, 2016; Coffey and Delamont, 2000; Culley and Portuges, 2012; Mirza, 2018; Rollock, 2012; Sanchez-Casal and MacDonald, 2002). Across the literature emerging from the Euro-American context cited above, three concerns have surfaced. The first concern is the work that is required to ensure feminist intellectual contributions are taken seriously across and within disciplines. The second concern is the work feminist academics do in universities to surface intersectional gender inequalities and the invisible and visible ways these are exhibited in hierarchical university structures. The third concern focusses on feminist pedagogy, drawing attention to the classroom structure, what is taught and how it is taught as central to feminist praxis and politics. Ultimately this literature is undergirded by understanding how feminist intellectual ideas are taken up in an increasingly marketized university system that relies more on teaching and research metrics as well as the emphasis on student experience as the main ways to determine a successful education experience.

I return to the second and third concern in this article by examining the ethical questions raised in the classroom as well as the racialised and gendered concerns that emerge when building feminist learning spaces. I explore these issues by engaging with the concept of safe spaces as it has emerged within the higher education sector and the ethics of care as developed by feminist movements (See FRIDA 2016; UAF-LAC, 2018) to surface the complexities of deliberately living feminist politics in a neoliberal university. Without aiming for easy answers, I draw attention to the power relations between students and that between students and teachers within the university infrastructure as key arbiters of how we make sense of safety and care in a diverse learning environment. I draw on these reflections to examine how interpretations of feminist pedagogy within neoliberal university classrooms can and do produce complex expectations for Black women academics. In my conclusion, I draw on Arao and Clemens

(2013) work on brave spaces to highlight the distinctions between the work that happens in the classroom and the historical value of safe spaces within the broader university environment. In doing so, I illustrate the attendant risks of conflating the logic that informed both the language and intention of safe spaces in the North American university landscape and the demands of a feminist classroom. In developing these questions, I adopt an auto-ethnographic approach as well as rely on reflections from seven Black and women of colour academics and five students from a targeted survey I administered to twenty respondents. The survey had six questions focussed on defining the feminist classroom, safe spaces, care as a feature of feminist classrooms and the risks, and opportunities inherent in this framing. This analysis is pulled together thematically in the sections that follow.

FRAMING NOTES

I moved to London in 2016 to take up a gender studies lectureship at SOAS, University of London after a decade working in the civil society sector across various parts of the African continent. SOAS is perceived to be a radical left institution. One can unpack what radical looks like or means for a university in the middle of London, with a history of training colonial officers within a higher education system where individual academic pursuits are rewarded more than collaborative community engaged scholarship. The students who come to SOAS are not homogenous even though many across the institution assume a sense of shared values and approach to embodying SOAS values. Some students are attracted to the "radical" brand of SOAS and end up disappointed when they discover that this is a university like any other, where pockets of critical scholarship exist while other pockets maintain "business as usual". Other students come for a traditional degree and educational experience and find the insistence on challenging hegemonic knowledge systems and ways of knowing in some classes "political"

and unnecessary. Other students are challenged and engaged by the decolonial approach to teaching in some of their classrooms thus leaving intellectually richer[1].

It is worth noting that in the broad categories of students I describe above, the most disappointed tend to be Black students. The specificity of the racial experience is linked to teaching staff demographics and an expectation that decolonial objectives should cut across the university. The university has no more than twenty-five tenured or permanent Black academic staff out of a teaching staff of three hundred. This distribution means that in some departments there are none or only one Black academic. I therefore walk into a gender studies classroom with an international student body with multiple expectations depending on the positionality of the students. This classroom dynamic means that I often meet students who tell me I am the first Black woman to teach them, and this is on a postgraduate degree programme. Consequently, there are explicit and implicit expectations of me from Black students alongside other students for whom my "unicorn" status can become a site to resolve the range of crises they encounter in the institution. While there is scholarship about student centred learning (See O'Neill and McMahon, 2005) not enough attention is paid to what it means for a feminist teacher to facilitate a classroom in the environment I have described above. I turn to these complexities in the sections that follow, beginning with an understanding of the history of safe spaces on university campuses and then exploring the meaning of a feminist classroom as a safe space through the survey responses.

CONCEPTUALISING SAFE SPACES

[1] Observations drawn from an internal Africa Review exercise co-chaired by Awino Okech and Mashood Baderin in 2020 and inclusive teaching forums convened with academic colleagues in July 2021

“Safe spaces” as a concept on university campuses emerges from the North American context and is used to refer to programmes devoted to supporting minority students (See Harpalani, 2017). However, there are a range of attributions to the term “safe space”. There are those who link it to psychologist Kurt Lewin’s (Lewin and Gold, 1999) work on “sensitivity training” for corporate leaders and other marginalized groups on college campuses. Other links to safe spaces are made to feminist and queer movements in the United States of America in the 1960’s and 70’s (See Beemyn, 2003). However, it is also clear that the civil rights movement in the United States of America produced a wave of autonomous organising on university campuses that were focussed on anti-Black racism thus generating safe spaces for Black students (See Arsenault, 2006; Van Dyke, 2003). Irrespective of the origin, the use of the term is the same, which is a focus on creating physical spaces that are devoted to the needs of marginalised groups. Across university campuses in the global North, programmes, centres, and organisations that target Black and minority students only are spaces in which conversations about structural inequalities that impact marginalised students can be unpacked and accompanying programmes and strategies to navigate the university developed. At SOAS, the Black Staff Student Forum and the Breaking Barriers programme are such initiatives which create leadership, mentoring and support frameworks from Black students and staff who are underrepresented in the university (See Haywood and Darko, 2021).

More recent iterations of safe spaces have emerged in relation to tenuous debates on academic freedom. Debates on universities in general and classrooms specifically as “safe spaces” have been hijacked by critics as evidence of efforts to infringe on academic freedom. In these articulations, the implicit assertion is that being held accountable for hate speech, or the perpetuation of racist and sexist ideas is in fact a constraint to robust academic debate that is at the heart of university life (See Zurcher, 2021; Trilling, 2020; Dickinson, 2020). Alongside the

deployment of safe spaces as evidence of "political correctness", a limit to academic freedom and plurality of views, critics of safe spaces have also challenged the importance and value of dedicated spaces for minority groups in universities where they are a minority. At the centre of this argument is the idea that such efforts foster racial division rather than build greater multi-cultural understanding.

If universities have become increasingly hostile environments with the rise of fascist and right-wing political parties gaining a foothold across Europe, then the demand for safety in the university takes on a different meaning (See Allen, 2019). We are no longer talking about safe spaces as special programmes and initiatives across universities that are delinked from the classroom. Consequently, framing the classroom as a site of intellectual engagement has been used to propagate violent ideas and present them as robust academic and intellectual exploration (See Brown & Mondon 2021; Tilley, 2021). It is in this context that feminist classrooms as safe spaces take on a different meaning, largely because of the transformative ideals that feminists in their diversity are generally geared towards. I have witnessed the bold resurgence of racist, racism denialism and sexist political ideas framed as plurality and the embodied impact of these ideas and policies in the British context (See Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, 2021). Consequently, it is in this context that I have held the framing of feminist classrooms as safe spaces and conversations that emanate from it as leading to a productive tension rather than a difficult conversation. The productive tension lies in allowing us to unpack what people mean when they invoke the term 'safe space' alongside the sometimes-disembodied claim about how safety is cultivated and sustained. I turn to my interlocutors to unpack this productive tension by examining their understanding of feminist classrooms as safe spaces whilst paying attention to the distinctions between the ethics of

feminist pedagogy whilst also paying attention to the political moment within which the claim of safety becomes more salient.

THE FEMINIST CLASSROOM AND SAFETY

Before I turn to conceptualisations of safety through my interlocutors, I will reflect on what I see as the purpose of the feminist classroom. Constructions of the feminist classroom and the work within it tend to privilege the site, which means the one or two hours when a class is held. However, the classroom is not only limited to the room where learning engagements are mediated around a syllabus. Once the class is over, the interaction with students through office hours, assignments, and email responses to concerns and anxieties remain an active part of the teaching and learning process and therefore are part of the concept of the classroom. Therefore, the teacher as chief navigator of the learning experience remains explicit in how universities are constructed yet, the feminist classroom focusses on the expansive ways in which the labour of teaching should involve co-creation. Radhika Govinda (2020) summarises, student-centred and student-led learning, co-construction of knowledge, peer-to-peer learning, situated knowledges, and reflexivity as key to feminist pedagogy. The interlocutors from the surveys corroborate this view with an emphasis on collaboration, shared learning, and co-creation as central to a feminist classroom.

> It feels like a space that is attuned to multiple sensory forms of learning beyond the textual, and one that creates space for vulnerability. A feminist classroom is one in which we acknowledge that power remains, while also trying to create more spaces for openness, collectivity and vulnerability. - Student

> A feminist classroom to me means a learning space that is dynamic, honest, caring, and deliberate. The space is conscious that learning, and teaching is done by all those in the room and that the personal cannot be taken away from that. It feels challenging and it also transcends the time in the classroom. - Student

> It is a class centred on the need of marginalised students and where gender, race and class are at the core of analysis. - Student

> To me a feminist classroom is first and foremost a space of self-reflexivity. It is a space where both teachers and students attempt to set aside ego and to think critically about the subjectivity they come into this space with. It is a space where we attempt to learn from one another rather than speak at one another. And it is a space of compassion, generosity, and forgiveness. - Academic

> An inclusive, caring, diverse space where everyone feels comfortable and safe to listen, discuss and create. - Student

The emphasis above on destabilising power relations as a core difference between feminist classrooms and non-feminist classrooms reflects the primary goal of feminist work. However, there are three major unexplored assumptions in the descriptions of the feminist classroom laid out above. The first, is the reality that challenging power hierarchies through a classroom experience, often results in a set of isolated experiences that are rarely mirrored in the university machine. The second, is that collaboration and co-creation dissolves power relations. While transformation is at the core of feminist worldmaking, pedagogical choices are not designed to dismantle power relations in a university structure that is sustained by those hierarchies. The

bounded conceptualisation of the classroom where the academic is still expected to curate the feminist experience ignores that the expectation of safety moves beyond teaching time. It is in this expanded space that power relations become evident. If we take power as not dissolved but simply lived in a transformative way, then sustaining an inclusive and caring space is not necessarily a collaborative task, the role of a teacher as guide in the feminist classroom remains key. While the academic can foster collaborative learning, the assumption that they should teach remains an important feature of the neoliberal university. Third, the expectation that safety cultivates room for vulnerability leads me to the next set of questions. Who has the privilege to be vulnerable? Who is required to bear responsibility for the impact of that vulnerability in the classroom? How does the construction of a classroom as a safe space create specific responsibilities for academics and not students? I turn to these questions through my interlocutors.

> As a student, it means that I can speak without judgment; a place where I am there as an individual who can learn and reflect and not be judged if my reflections are not precisely on point. For example, a classroom discussing feminist topics can be quite judgemental if you did not think exactly in the same way as the others, and a safe space would be when the teacher highlights that learning is a process.

> A safe space between the students and teachers, so calling out/removing those who abuse this space or make inappropriate/uncomfortable comments; a space for non-judgemental sharing and listening; a space of respect for one another; a space without hierarchy even with teachers - Student

> I imagine a safe space being safe from hegemonic viewpoints that erase or marginalise other viewpoints, and how those get expressed in the classroom, through lecturers, students, materials, the space itself - Student

> A safe space is a space where one can be vulnerable and expect others to not use that vulnerability against you in the future. - Student

> For me, safe spaces are particularly important to build for historically excluded and marginalized groups for whom the simple fact of being in the mainstream is an act of resistance. As such, the guidelines for how to communicate, how to exchange, and the expectations about respect and care must be written on course outlines and discussed at the very onset of the class. It must be modelled. And the space must be rebuilt and nurtured each class session. Both students and teachers go in [and] out various places during the semester where violence is meted routinely. We must account for this and allow all participants to go through a process of re-entry. If one is lucky, that re-entry process takes less and less time with each class session - Academic

Safety, as described by the survey respondents above, focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed ways our societies are organised and reproduced in universities. Safety in this context therefore focuses on ensuring that while a learning environment is cultivated, harmful views are not left unchallenged. This conceptualisation of safety is one that aligns with the transformative goals of feminist pedagogy. It also becomes an important objective given a political environment in which anti-racist and critical race scholarship is under attack (See Banerjee and Sawo, 2021). However, the objective of a classroom as a collaborative learning space can be hindered if the message is that majority groups come to class to bear witness or

listen as suggested by two interlocutors above. There are three distinctions to make here about hegemony. The first distinction is the decolonial objective of prioritising majority world knowledge given global knowledge inequities. The second distinction is the responsibility of the teacher to manage the unlearning process for students whose well-established worldviews are unsettled. The reasonable expectation that teachers should challenge harmful views is different from creating a classroom in which only marginalised voices are privileged. How a teacher deals with what is considered a harmful or problematic view could be the transformative turning point for the speaker or the line that leads to a formal complaint from the student for a hostile classroom. The third and final distinction is the pedagogical task of ensuring an inclusive classroom, where everyone can engage.

While a feminist classroom should be a space for reflexivity and which therefore enables vulnerability, policing views however problematic they are is both a political and an ethical responsibility that is consistently negotiated in real time. If we read it as an ethical task of an educator, then safety is not a helpful way to describe the responsibility we hold in the classroom. Let me develop this idea through the respondents below who capture the dilemmas associated with thinking about university classrooms as safe spaces. They point to safety as ensuring marginalised groups are not further marginalised. However, there is also a recognition that safety can be construed as not being subjected to uncomfortable or challenging topics or discussions. Finally, the notion of safety may imply that feminist classrooms are not devoid of power relations and that hierarchies cease to exist.

> I am weary of a classroom being described as safe. When I think of safety I think of comfort, and I think comfort is anathema to the kind of politics we are trying to inspire through our classrooms. We often equate safety with care and assume to be made to

> feel safe is to be cared for. We accuse those who make us uncomfortable of threatening our safety. Therefore, I am fearful of such terms - Academic

> As a student, I'm always a bit sceptical of the idea of a safe space - or even a safer space - because I'm just not sure it's possible. But I would expect it to be a space in which efforts are made to support voices that are usually marginalised in UK classrooms (Black and POC voices, women's and trans people's voices, disabled voices etc). I would hope that it would be a space in which direct or indirect actions and speech that harm people would be identified and that attempts would be made to create accountability for those speech and actions within the classroom

> I also think it is important to remind others and ourselves that a classroom is not a space of friendship or kinship, but a space of learning with strangers that can allow community to emerge if we enter it in certain ways - Academic

In the reluctance to label classrooms as safe spaces there is an implicit assertion that safety can be read as foreclosing the space for difficult conversations that of necessity happen in gender studies classrooms. Consequently, safety is reframed as the need to set up the conditions to have complex conversations in a manner that opens rather than forecloses learning and transformation. In essence, our task is to assume in the first instance that questions are treated as an invitation to learn rather than leap to the view that they are intended to harm. However, there is also an expectation in the facilitation role that the teacher holds, is to educate without preventing and/or limiting the ability of folks to come in and out of conversations. The feminist classroom is always a place for learning and unlearning deeply held views on issues that implicate us, and this will always be a source of discomfort. How we create conditions for

shared reflection during difficult conversations rather than looking to the teacher as the fixer is key. How we do this whilst not placing an additional burden on students who are racially othered and who do not experience the rewards of vulnerability in the same way is equally important. If the classroom is a collaborative space, how do we share the power of managing complexity rather than deferring to the teacher as an authority when complex situations emerge for a racially othered academic.

I turn to care as a framework that has emerged in feminist movement building spaces in ways that I find comprehensive because it is seen as critical to sustaining, building and embodying movement work and viewed as a collective process rather than an individual one (See UAF-LAC 2018).I draw on the work of FRIDA Fund and Urgent Action Fund Latin America who have developed how collective care underpins the ethos to their work. In their conceptualisation of care, FRIDA and UAF-LAC make distinctions between individuals taking care of themselves by centring wellbeing as critical to how they move in the world from the need for movement spaces to be deliberate about care. Collective care in these instances is about time allocated to work, rest and the financial resources given to prioritisation to mental and physical wellbeing. There is mutuality in this movement articulation of collective care that requires everyone to show up fully and where mutual accountability and responsibility are upheld as an important mode of engaging. In thinking about care, I am interested in who people think should provide the care that leads to safety. The racialised, classed and gendered nature of these expectations and the absence of reciprocity in universities forms the basis of my analysis below.

CARE IN FEMINIST CLASSROOMS

> Care means pay attention to the needs of students […] by caring more about marginalized students. As symbol I can cite the fact to adapt assignment to the need of students - Student

> I see care as an essential part of building safe spaces. Part of practices of care are included in my curriculum by thinking, what do students need beyond course content. It is how I assess [the] need for flexibility in class. How we talk about care for the communities we live in by relating theories and debates to our everyday life. It is taking time to check in at the beginning of class through our "re-entry" process. - Academic

The descriptions of care above centre the student and the role of teachers in ensuring that educational inequalities are not reproduced in the classroom. The reference to assignments and coping expands the classroom. However, it also isolates the feminist classroom from the broader environment within which the expectation to subvert rules and norms around education are not embedded. It is also evident that the framing of care above does not address care for caregivers even when not always called that and who like the students navigate the same life worlds. The expectation that teachers should provide extensive pastoral support as part of demonstrating care and not care as a collective praxis that is reciprocal between students and staff is a factor of the neo-liberal university. Students are clients who require good service from the institution. Even where claims about decolonising the university are made, the praxis of decolonised utopias are not actively built and envisioned. Consequently, we have a university model in which focus is primarily on management and the work to transform universities is seen as work that is done in the cracks of the university rather than at the centre of the university. This approach positions “us” versus “them” as a way of imagining change in

universities, leading to the expectation that even where care is centred as an ethos in the feminist classroom, it should come from the teacher rather than a collective praxis to which everyone is held accountable.

The reflections below focus on the risks associated with discourses on care in the neo-liberal university. They capture the racialised, gendered expectations of care and underscore the production of Black women as not sufficiently feminist for drawing boundaries to survive institutions that are extractive. More importantly, one interlocutor surfaces the danger of isolated non-institutionalised approaches to care which in addition to creating more labour for staff generate insecurity for students when similar support is absent across the university.

> I think the biggest risk is that in a university classroom, much like in other areas of neoliberal society, the burden of care is placed primarily on black women, LGBTQ folks and people of colour who are expected to be generous with their time, knowledge, and energy despite being given little to no support or care themselves. Care is not seen as reciprocal and therefore when black women, for example, set up boundaries they are read as unapproachable, strict, and unhelpful. This transactional framework creates a kind of entitlement where students expect a level of care that they are not willing to give to their instructors - Academic

> As a Black woman one of the biggest risks of centring care in this context is being perceived at the quintessential Mamie. Black women are too often typecast as caregivers, problem solvers, and strong women who are pillars of community. In the classroom these stereotypes can lead to students disproportionately seeking you out to lay down their burdens and in the worst cases, simply not prioritizing your courses

because "you care" and then asking you for indulgence when they fail to meet class expectations - Academic

Mostly just that the university system isn't set up to care, and so trying to make it happen in isolation in one classroom can feel hollow. Issues such as funding, mental health, or lack of institutional support for example can't easily be handled there. Falling back on superficial forms of care might be easy - Student

Care in universities is not set up as reciprocal. My isolated experiences of reciprocal collective care are few and far between. In my four years at SOAS, I can identify only two instances of reciprocal care that I highlight below. I travelled abroad for a conference and when I returned to London, I contracted a stomach infection. I ended up in the emergency room of the hospital and was hospitalised as the doctors tried to figure out what was wrong with me. When I returned to work the next week, I found a get-well card underneath my office door from four Black women students wishing me a quick recovery and thanking me for my work. I was very touched by the small but important gesture and emailed them to say as much. A few months later some trouble was brewing in the cohort. A student received an unsatisfactory mark for a paper marked by a teaching assistant, a complaint they brought to me. I read the paper and other papers from the modules in our programme they referenced as comparators. Any teacher will tell you that checking how a student performed in a different module is not a sound basis to explain why they did poorly in a module, but I did it. I invited the student for a subsequent meeting to carefully explain that this was not an inconsistency in marking as they claimed, the quality of the papers was vastly different. The student agreed and claimed the matter was resolved. After our conversation they attempted to instigate a collective complaint across the cohort. A Black student alerted me to this pending “collective complaint”. The collective

complaint did not gain traction, but it did not stop the student from revisiting what they said was a concluded matter through the student support team asserting that this was a widespread complaint in the cohort. A fact I knew not to be true. The student who sent me the “heads-up” message did not need to do it. They could have assumed that I have sufficient experience to handle these matters. However, they did so because they knew how unsubstantiated student complaints on a programme and modules convened by a Black woman can easily become questions about teaching quality and convening rigour. It is also worth flagging that the teaching assistant against whom the marking inconsistency complaint was levelled against happened to be a woman of colour and the modules where teaching and marking was done by White colleagues were the comparators.

I return to these examples to illustrate how the praxis of care within the expansive classroom actively works against reciprocity and the importance of centring personhood that feminist values privilege. While arguments are made about breaking hierarchies in the classroom, those hierarchies are reinstated where teachers are concerned and when things get difficult. When feminist academics embody and practice ways of being in a classroom that are the anti-thesis of what exists outside it, they are doing so based on a commitment to transformational spaces. Collective care as articulated by feminist social movements centres on reciprocity. When we say care is key in a feminist classroom and care should centre on the students, who cares for the care givers?

WHAT NEXT FOR FEMINIST CLASSROOMS?

> One risk is the possibility of creating an image of the classroom as one devoid of power relations, as one that can be made 'safe.' I don't think this is ever fully possible; while

> classrooms can be made safer or more open, I don't believe they can ever be safe spaces, and using the term might misrepresent how classrooms operate - Academic

The university classroom is an aspirational site in which a range of interconnected things can occur. For feminist academics, it is a space to trace the lineage of feminist intellectual labour. For many feminist scholars from the majority world this means centring the worlds of those outside the global North and to link these life worlds and the ever-evolving environment we occupy within, and most importantly, outside the university. The university is only one part of our lives and what we witness within it is a microcosm of the world we inhabit. The deliberate work to think about power and knowledge production differently, is relational, which must always be rooted in an understanding of how race, gender and class mediate our experiences of the world. For feminists, the objective is not to reproduce harmful relationships to power but rather transform them without eliding them.

However, the wave of "academic freedom" policies designed to muzzle heterodox approaches to understanding the world, demand intentionality to the classroom as a site and the university as a space that unpacks but does not sustain ideologies that reproduce inequalities. The efforts to collapse the original meaning of safe space in universities with academic freedom that mobilises "diversity" of views and "debate" to sustain racist, sexist and therefore often violent views about racially othered groups requires that we bear more responsibility in how we manage the classroom. Consequently, how we navigate complex sometimes difficult conversations about safety in ways that yield transformative goals rather than create greater schisms is key. Given the origins of safe spaces explored earlier in this paper and my interlocutors' assertions about the risks associated with naming a classroom as a safe space, I would like to close with Arao and Clemens (2013: 143 - 148) on brave spaces. I argue that a re-interpretation of a classroom as a brave space purposefully cultivates the shared responsibility for the classroom thus engendering care as shared and leads what are often

difficult conversations into a place of transformative possibilities. Arao and Clemens (2013) offer principles of brave spaces and I focus on four of them here. The first is controversy with civility, where varying opinions are accepted. The second is the importance of owning intentions and impacts, by acknowledging and discussing instances where a dialogue has affected the emotional wellbeing of another person. It follows that if we are required to take responsibility for what and how we engage in debate, then how people choose to surface "controversy" is thought through. Third, challenge by choice, is an invitation to step in and out of challenging conversations. Fourth, respect that is rooted in one another's basic personhood and an agreement not to intentionally inflict harm on one another reframes safety through responsibility for the purpose of the feminist classroom, which is to learn and unlearn complex embodied subjects. Consequently, the responsibility we collectively bear when having difficult and uncomfortable conversations centres personhood and respect. A brave space approach to the feminist classroom, allows us to separate the decolonial work, which is a focus on the politics of knowledge production through what we teach and who we think with, the praxis of inclusive teaching, who speaks, how people learn from the purpose of a learning environment where we challenge structural inequalities without reproducing them.

BIOGRAPHY

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