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5

Feminist Academic and Activist Praxis in Service of the Transnational

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Touch paper—a small piece of paper on one end of a firework, which you light in order to start the firework burning: The instructions on the fireworks said, "Light the blue touch paper, and stand well clear."

In this chapter we address the nature of our collaboration as a black activist in the Guyanese women's organization Red Thread, and as a white British academic in a Canadian university who works with Red Thread. In so doing we investigate the dialogic aspects of our political journeys as collaborators and attempt to capture some of the ways in which we bump up against and challenge each other's political and social locations and intellectual and emotional priorities in our "alliance work," We suggest that our dialogues are marked by productive tensions (hopefully reflected throughout the chapter in the account of our journeys together but most specifically in the list of questions we end the chapter with) that have enabled us to identify some of the most pressing political questions about feminist research and activism that largely prevent dialogues from happening between Northern-based academic feminists and Southern-based activist organizations/movements.

Our aim here is to discuss a specific type of transnational feminist practice, that between feminist academics and activists in the global North and South, in relation to the research process itself, and its function as a touch paper serving to ignite and throw into sharp relief a number of issues: political, epistemological, and methodological. In other words, rather than privilege the products of our research, we focus instead on the political and intellectual interventions that are enabled by our collaboration, proving that one can never "stand well clear" of the racialized, classed, gendered, and transnational power relations that saturate the research in which we have engaged.

We first met in Guyana when we were both in our mid-twenties and where our mutual interest in left-wing politics set the stage for a potential friendship and working partnership.[1] It should come as no surprise that, over the twenty years we have known each other, the last fifteen of which we have been working together, the nature of our collaboration has—at times—taken front stage, relegating its products to the background. And although it is a collaboration based on solidarity, love, friendship, and laughter, it has also been characterized, as are many relations, by silences, intense inequalities, difficult discussions about racism/whiteness, and profound differences. All of these issues, as always, are played out through individuals' embodied interactions and lives but they all also speak to manifestations of classed, racialized, gendered, and transnational power relations that resound and circulate on a number of scales beyond that of the embodied individual and of relationships between individuals.

We started out working together very specifically being interested in the research results and the efficient working of the research team we started up together in Red Thread. But we have ended up questioning a much broader set of interests in terms of the power dynamics of the research process itself (albeit at Karen's insistence that these discussions were usually distractions from the daily process of survival in a country whose people she describes as "drowning") and which we think overlaps with a major, and recurring, tension between northern academic feminists' reflexive discussions of power in the research process and their (ironic, often unintentional) estrangement from the political struggles of survival in scenarios where people/communities are, indeed, "drowning." In this chapter we discuss four aspects of the power dynamics of the transnational research processes in which we have engaged: how the research process has been further complicated by the NGOization of development; how we have interrogated the feminist production of knowledge; the links between activism, social change, and research; and addressing dimensions of power raised by the research that also speak to silences within Red Thread. Prior to discussing these issues we give a brief contextualization of Guyana and an overview of the work and mandate of Red Thread.

Red Thread in Guyana

Guyana is a country carved out of transatlantic processes of domination and oppression; it is a product of the interrelated processes of the genocide of Amerindian populations, the genocidal slave trade from Africa, and the importation of the indentured labor of people from India, Portugal, and China. Dogged by low prices for its exports of bauxite, timber, and sugar, as well as internal corruption, it is currently embroiled in a downward spiral of narco violence, criminal activity, and political/ethnic conflict, all of which are increasingly militarized and overlapping. Health care and education are on the verge of collapse, and there is general agreement that it is the informal sector—the smuggling of people, gold, and cocaine—that dominates the economy. The dominance of political life since Independence in 1966 first by the Afro-Guyanese–supported Peoples National Congress, and since 1992 by the Indo-Guyanese–supported Peoples Progressive Party, has effectively prevented the development of a political culture in which movements (e.g., trade union movement, women's movement, and so on) and organizations that people form and direct, such as the ones they create for practical purposes (e.g., Friendly and Burial Societies), could sustain themselves. It is in this culture that Red Thread has, for the last twenty years, struggled to survive.

From independence in 1966 until the late 1980s Guyana was officially a cooperative socialist republic. As in many countries in the 1980s with a socialist ideology, women's organizations were restricted to religious organizations, trade unions, and wings of political parties. Red Thread emerged in October 1986; it came into existence through the decision of a small, highly educated and politically grounded group of women who had the information, the resources, and the experience necessary for its establishment. Its founders were active members or supporters of the Working People's Alliance (WPA), who had learned from experience that this form of organizing could not specifically focus on the needs of women. Cognizant of the growing impoverishment of women in the 1980s, they disbanded the Women's Section of the WPA and formed the autonomous organization Red Thread, thereby creating the space to raise gender issues that would not be relegated to the back burner of party politics.

Since their establishment Red Thread has had a mercurial existence not only in terms of activities but also in terms of numbers. Currently they form a collective of approximately twenty members, mostly based in Guyana but also including Guyanese and non-Guyanese women in the diaspora. Around this core collective is a set of national, regional, and transnational networks of women associated with Red Thread in one or more of its programs. This small number is a substantial reduction from the 1980s when over two hundred women were involved; the fall in numbers reflects the change in focus from income generation projects to one of activist research and advocacy and community-based interventions. However, these numbers give no indication of the extensiveness and high profile of Red Thread's activities

on a regional and global basis. From its inception Red Thread has always engaged in transnational politics, both within and beyond the Caribbean. The organization is currently, for example, a part of the Global Women's Strike, most recently attending the World Social Forum with the Strike in Venezuela in 2006.[2]

Since the early 1990s, starved of funds and working almost entirely on the basis of voluntary labor, Red Thread has scaled down its outreach operations, but the terrain of Red Thread is still one of doing: organizing with local communities, conducting workshops, devising radio skits, performing popular theater, writing and disseminating informational pamphlets, recording life histories, and producing academic and policy reports as well as letters and articles in the press have positioned Red Thread as a significant broker of public opinion.[3] Its members have also been at the forefront of advocating, designing, and producing for popular dissemination legislative information pertaining to the laws of Guyana and women's legal rights. They have conducted educational and training workshops promoting leadership formation and skill transfer; they give advice, help, and immediate support to individual women; and they do advocacy work around issues of poverty, domestic violence and child abuse, the environment, women's work, health care, and literacy. Red Thread has always been a place where women can access social networks, practical help, and analytical skills, providing the opportunity for reflection, analysis, and assessment of what has been taken for granted. All too aware of the fragmented nature of marginalized women's practices, members emphasize that their group strength is an important asset and resource at their disposal. Over the years its politics have moved beyond being articulated by only its middle-class members to include those of its grassroots members, resulting in a more direct reflection of its politics in the work that it does. It has always had intersectionality at its heart and it is still the only women's organization in the country that sets itself the goal of working with women across racialized, classed, and geographical divides.

Arguably, many of these activities have now become part of an NGOized bureaucracy in many parts of the global South, but Red Thread has resisted being defined as an NGO and risk having its agenda skewed by efforts to appease donors rather than the grassroots women with whom it works. Its commitment is to a viable state of development in the country that places poor women and their needs at the center of state policies recognizing that the "care" work in which they engage is the very core of development (see table 5.1, which outlines the aims of Red Thread). Given the polarized and racialized political party structure the country inherited it also attempts to work across classed and racialized divides that serve to separate women and communities by engaging in acts of citizenship building that create more equitable social relations and communities. Furthermore, its analysis of international relations places it firmly in an antiglobalization framing in relation to the projects of neoliberal capitalist development and modernization.

Table 5.1 The Aims of Red Thread

1. To work for women's unwaged and low-waged, caring work to be revalued and properly remunerated and for equal pay for work of equal value.
2. To work against all forms of violence, especially against women and children, beginning with domestic violence and violence during racial and/or political conflict, and to support victims of such violence.
3. To build solidarity among women across divides and to oppose all forms of discrimination including that on the grounds of sex, race, class, dis/ability, age, sexual identity, and HIV status.
4. Wherever possible, to provide individual women and groups of women with the information, skills, and other support they need to fight against economic, social, and political injustices.
5. To develop, evaluate, and share the lessons of projects addressing key issues including grassroots women's income generation, women's health, and children's literacy.

Productive Tensions and Pressing Questions

It is now fifteen years since we started to work together, establishing the research team in Red Thread, providing us with many occasions to work through the various issues that circulate within our "activism/academia" transnational feminist practice. We turn now to brief synopses of some of the issues that our collaboration has forced us to address. As we stated earlier, exploring the whys and hows of the manner in which we work through these issues is a primary goal of this chapter. These include thinking through how the North and South dimensions of our collaboration relate to each other, understanding how the battles of daily life in the South are being fought out between communities and governments in ways that feminist academia in the North has largely ignored, and working through the ways in which nonexploitative personal and professional relations (on both sides) can be developed.

The NGOization of Development

Since the 1980s, NGOs increasingly have become the vehicles through which funding for development is delivered. Despite the diversity among NGOs and their funders, the extent to which NGOs have become corporatized, acting as arms of the state and playing an active part in the downloading of labor and costs from the state to local communities, is well documented (Farrington and Bebbington 1993). Our concerns with the NGOization of development are twofold.

First, in terms of the increasing utilization of NGOs to carry out development projects, Red Thread, as we stated earlier, is not an NGO. Its history of political engagement and a determination to define its own agenda has enabled Red Thread to resist its incorporation into the NGO sector with all the attendant issues of incorporating activism into an institutional framework that has increasingly come to mimic that of state bureaucracies. But its lack of official status has caused problems with some donors refusing to give monies to Red Thread unless it officially registers for NGO status. Hence, Red Thread suffers from circumscription of funding because of its refusal to make itself accountable to certain donors, not in the sense of drawing up accounts but of being drawn into a process of "moral accountability" (Hilhorst 2003) whereby donors have a role to play in negotiating the meaning and legitimacy of Red Thread's activities.[4] But neither is Red Thread prepared to accept that funding should be the major determinant of what work they do.

Bargaining and negotiating in terms of access to acceptable funding, however, have become increasingly problematic and time consuming, and while this does not necessarily compromise feminist transnational praxis, it has caused us to consider how feminist academic activism can so easily turn into feminist academic colonization. For example, one research project in which we engaged was funded by an international organization that was prepared to accept Red Thread's non-NGO status but which stipulated that the research contract had to label Linda as the "consultant," the so-called expert in charge of the project who was "authorized" to "employ" Red Thread members. There were also further stipulations that a certain (large) percentage of the research monies had to be spent on the consultant's fee. It was impossible to label the northern-based consultant and the southern-based counterpart as equal partners and certainly Red Thread could not be seen as essential to the project's success; the research contract necessitated a hierarchization of the research team in which the North/South and academic/activist divides were further solidified. It was only after much discussion in which Linda agreed to donate her "fee" to Red Thread that we could both feel comfortable enough to accept the research contract. This and other experiences have led to Red Thread no longer agreeing to work with individuals or organizations who offer to pay them a stipend without disclosing the total amount of the grant they have and the proportion that is going to Red Thread compared to the proportion going to consultants, graduate students, coapplicants, and others associated with the research.

A second concern with the increasing corporatization of NGOs is with the attendant practices of establishing targets and measurable outcomes, of making development "sustainable" while at the same time neatly packaging it up into projects that deal, for example, with "women" or other apparently discrete aspects of development for disconnected periods of time without reference to how the organization is supposed to sustain itself outside of funding cycles. The ability to deal with the consequences of this funding model for development—in other words, of dealing with the in-betweenness of projects that does not fit into neatly circumscribed categories—is an issue that we have increasingly had to address by redistributing funds from funded projects to support the basic needs of Red Thread, such as having a building to work from and being able to provide wages for its members "between projects." Yet increasing accountability to donors means being subversive about this, and this is something we both resent, revealing as it does that donors not only influence agendas for development but also impact upon the everyday practices and the meanings that NGOs attach to their organization.

Interrogating Feminist Knowledge Production in Academia and in Red Thread

Although the NGOization of development goes some way to explaining Red Thread's inability to develop a constant flow of funds into the organization, and hence, of being able to craft a research agenda that addresses the needs of Red Thread, feminist academia has also played a role in this process, and it is to this that we now turn. While Red Thread members had conducted research investigating and publishing life histories of Guyanese women, the Research Team was largely established at Linda's instigation and her need to establish a research agenda as part of a process of securing tenure and promotion. Hence, the timing of research projects has mostly been dictated by funding sources and career trajectories in the North as opposed

to Red Thread setting out its own research agenda. In other words, research serves what is external to Red Thread in the sense that it produces analyses that can be used by academics and agencies but not always by Red Thread, whose members can exhaust themselves doing the research and at the end have neither the energy nor the resources to implement transformative practices.

Feminist academics in the North have privileges; even when they are not equally distributed they are likely to be available in greater supply in a country such as Canada relative to those for feminists of all classes in a country such as Guyana. These privileges come from political liberties that include the freedom of speech and freedom from persecution; from economic liberties that include freedom from hunger, homelessness, and poverty; and from social liberties that include access to facilities, education, and training, as well as access to information, and often access to monies. In addition to these privileges, it has also been argued that the increasing institutionalization of feminist academic research in departments of women's studies has resulted in a situation that serves to profit individual women's careers rather than promoting social change. The academic feminist label, for many activist organizations, now has the baggage of careerism, of maintaining the status quo, and of rising to the top rather than aiming for transformation. Certainly, Red Thread's view on Caribbean feminism, while not subscribing to a simple dichotomy between northern feminists (as exploiters) and southern women (as victims), emphasizes its irrelevance, an exclusive club-cum-career path for both northern and, increasingly, southern feminists, increasingly incorporated into the institutionalized world of NGOs as corporate managers or consultants, who often exhibit a lack of consciousness about class privilege and complacency around social change, and who fail to acknowledge their inability to speak for all women.

But this is not to argue that all the benefits of "collaborative research" go to feminist academics and none to Red Thread members. The setting up of the research team was a mutual agreement between us in that participation in the research provided skills development to women in Red Thread that has led to a range of material benefits.[5] So while the results of the many research projects we have conducted have obviously been of interest to Red Thread, it has also been the case that research has continued because it has also provided members with periods of employment such as with United Nations organizations or other international organizations, such as the Department for International Development (DfID), and academics, from the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada, who have wanted to utilize the research skills and contacts of Red Thread.[6] Moreover, throughout the 2000s Red Thread has increasingly engaged in research practices that relate directly to their own desires to know more about situations that will further their community-based work, for example, on women's unpaid reproductive labor and on initiatives to bring women together across racialized divides.

As beneficiaries of research women in Red Thread are not only paid research workers but are also redefining their subjectivities and seeing themselves as knowing subjects—asking questions, setting agendas, and becoming increasingly unwilling to accept that their everyday lives are irrelevant to knowledge production. For example, Red Thread members met with students from the University of Guyana in a joint seminar. It was here that Cora from Red Thread, a working-class black woman with seven children, but with no schooling beyond primary level, questioned the students in a discussion about how family units were defined.[7] The students insisted that only blood members constituted family, albeit living themselves in a society where many variations on the Western-based notion of the nuclear family existed, but Cora continued to insist on defining Karen as a member of her family given the central role she played in her life. On another occasion Cora had a conversation with Linda about how she perceived her as being racist for spending more time with the Indo-Guyanese women in Red Thread than the Afro-Guyanese women. Cora's work in Red Thread over the years had provided her with the confidence and ability to use her own life experiences to give voice to her beliefs and to question the attitudes and practices of others.

However, the creation of a new class of women who can produce their own knowledge and engage in research, and who can be seen as having income generating skills usually reserved for an academic elite, has also created its own problems and is something that Red Thread has struggled with: while Red Thread started off by organizing with grassroots women, there is an ever present danger that without consciousness and questioning of its politics, it will end up creating an elite group of the grassroots instead of promoting an engagement working with women like themselves to promote change for everyone's benefit. The implication for transnational feminist praxis is that we need to think more deeply about how the research process itself is reproducing hierarchies—academic feminists versus activists and elite grassroots women versus other grassroots women—and creating the very same kind of divides that Red Thread is actively trying to work against. Our focus is now on imagining what an alternative set of research priorities might look like, ones, for example, that accept measuring transformative

practices, moral accountability, and self-empowerment as the fundamental building blocks of development.

In terms of transnational feminist praxis the current status of academic feminism requires that just as Red Thread has to constantly examine whether its relationship with the communities it works with is based on transformative work rather than Red Thread's survival needs, so academic feminism has to go beyond a solidarity based on convenience; it has to go beyond being more beneficial for the academic than the activist. In other words, while academic feminists conducting research in the global South with women's organizations may have little to give beyond academic knowledge and skill training, it has to be recognized that they are often more likely to benefit professionally from the research conducted in terms of furthering their academic careers, increasing their number of publications, training graduate students, providing a research environment that will lead to the awarding of graduate degrees, and benefiting more financially, while utilizing the knowledge base of grassroots women in order to do so.

Suitable Methods: The Links between Activism, Social Change, and Research

There are other implications for transnational feminist praxis in reevaluating the links between social change, activism, and research, not least because debates over the nature of feminist knowledge production in the North have come to focus less on the link between praxis, academic knowledge, and activism and more on questions of feminist epistemology, despite Nancy Fraser (1989: 6) so succinctly stating that "you can't get a politics straight out of epistemology." Moreover, academic feminists' concerns with explicating a feminist epistemology have come to define the parameters of debates about the methodological grounding of research, and this has had severe consequences for the methods that have been deemed suitable for feminist research, in brief, qualitative techniques are good whereas quantitative techniques are bad. Notwithstanding the obvious, and many, problematic assumptions these divides assume, we emphasize here they are divides that pertain to northern academic constructions of knowledge production and they have little purchase for feminist activists in the global South.

It is increasingly being recognized however within the northern academy that feminist debates about the unsuitability of quantitative methods for feminist purposes are less about these techniques of inquiry being incompatible with feminist research but more about attempts by academic feminists to "professionalize" feminism by claiming its own distinctive approach to knowledge production, one that was least likely to mimic the objectivist, value-neutral epistemological positions adopted in mainstream scientific approaches. As Oakley states:

> Feminism needed a research method, a distinct methodology, in order to occupy a distinctive place in the academy and acquire social status and moral legitimacy. Opposition to "traditional" research methods as much as innovation of alternative ones provided an organizing platform for feminist scholarship. This opposition, and the whole contention of positivism and realism as inherently anti-feminist, was reinforced when postmodernism entered the feminist critique in the 1980s. As Wolf (1996: 60) has commented, it is probably no accident the "often inaccessible, abstract and hypertheoretical language" of postmodernism gained ascendancy at the same time as women increased their representation within academia. (Oakley 1998: 716)

Hence, much feminist research in the global North, even in many social science disciplines, is virtually synonymous with qualitative techniques. We suggest that there needs to be much greater flexibility over questions of suitable feminist methods. Over time, alongside the understanding that all data are representations, we have increasingly come to interrogate the methods that Red Thread has utilized, questioning the equation of feminist practice with qualitative approaches and reclaiming the value of quantitative research by feminist activists. We think this is important because while there is a divide between those who do quantitative research and those who do not, there is a larger divide between those who do not and those who *cannot*, because they lack the training in even the most basic of statistical analyses. Northern academic feminists run the risk of producing new generations of feminist academics who are unable to use quantitative methods in a non-positivist way. Resistance to using quantitative methods creates another divide then between North and South; a desire by northern feminist academics working in the global South to refrain from using quantitative methods is taken largely in ignorance of the situation of grassroots women's organizations in the South for whom research funding is often tied to the production of quantified data.

Much of the research training in Red Thread has been about becoming aware of the ways in which women can become "data literate" in that they can understand what data sources are available, how data come to be collected, and how they are translated into statistics, statistics that

often purport to portray aspects of their own social lives, as well as the deficiencies of such data.[8] As one woman in Red Thread stated: "Many decisions about our lives are taken from figures and we don't know where these figures come from and we should be able to control this." Engaging in these research exercises has also allowed us to discuss such questions as why only certain data are collected and why the data are organized into particular categories. Not only do these questions expose the political nature of the process of production of social statistics about women; they also reveal assumptions about the valuing of women.[9] Our aim has also been to prove to funding agencies that women who often had no schooling beyond primary level could work together to produce reliable and valid data; indeed it is their very positionality that has allowed women in Red Thread to collect exceptionally high-quality research data.

Dealing with Silences: Engaging with Sexuality

While it has been easy to have conversations around such apparently neutral issues as appropriate methods it has been much harder to address other issues for which the political space not only across the country but also within Red Thread has been nonexistent. Guyana is commonly regarded as a homophobic country in which the only acceptable sexuality is heterosexuality. Recent attempts to introduce a new clause into the Constitution on nondiscrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation provoked such public hostility that the president has refused to endorse it. Research we conducted in the late 1990s (Peake and Trotz 1999) showed that lesbians and gay men are despised for engaging in sex for reasons unassociated with procreation; their failure to reproduce is not only considered to be a biological betrayal but also a social betrayal in their failure to contribute to the reproduction of the nation and their "race." In such a deeply religious and culturally intolerant country gays and lesbians are seen as "unnatural"; in our research they are generally described as being wicked, depraved, corrupt, impure, immoral, polluted, filthy, and profligate. Viewed as sexual deviates, gays and lesbians are socially shunned and ostracized. Such is the opprobrium attached to homosexuality that there are no gay or lesbian couples living openly in the country. There are no clubs, bars, cafes, restaurants, or other sociable public spaces where gays or lesbians would be tolerated. It follows that there is no social or political space for gay men, lesbians, or trans folk in Guyana. Given their low to practically nonexistent public profile neither had Red Thread—until 2006—taken any public position on issues of sexuality.[10]

Coming from North America, where nondominant sexualities are often celebrated or at least tolerated, into a society where there is no room for discussion of the discrimination faced by those who are not heterosexual has been a struggle between the two of us, with Linda advocating that it should be an issue that is raised within Red Thread and Karen not being convinced that it was an issue (until recently) that had the capacity to generate discussion and hence social action. Linda's assumptions, ones that are often made by northern-based academic feminists, about how the silences around issues of sexuality should be erased, has obvious implications when engaging in transnational feminist praxis in that the political spaces that northern feminist academics may find themselves within simply do not exist in some places in the South (and vice versa). We have recently reached an agreement to conduct research on youth and sexualities in Guyana, to investigate the extent to which the narrow range of acceptable sexualities hinders participation in development processes.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have grounded our discussion of transnational feminist praxis in the specific context of Guyana and within the evolution of Red Thread. We have also suggested that feminist conversations in northern academia (as progressive as they may seem) may not be relevant to many southern groups. We turn to one comment that Karen made when we were discussing this chapter because we feel it encapsulates many of the issues and contradictions to which transnational feminist praxis gives rise:

> You know I am coming to this meeting [the workshop in Minneapolis where these chapters were first discussed] but I should really be in Guyana dealing with crises. . . . I could turn into one of these people, one of these meeting people, but all these meetings take me away from my work. Whether it's the academy or the funders' meetings . . . it has happened to a lot of people in the Caribbean. They end up only representing but not doing any local work. . . . These transnational conversations are of much more use for the North; there is no direct benefit to the South as there could be for folks in the North, like academic publications and so on. In terms of the service of the transnational much more could be done to put groups like Red Thread in touch with other southern groups, like Sangtin for example. Given the racial context in Guyana we could learn so much from women activists in India and Africa, and indigenous groups in Latin America. You

know, feminist academics have access to all worlds but they are not putting those worlds in touch with each other. Red Thread exists to contribute to transformative politics. Its concern is to look at how to change things and we don't get the kind of help we need from feminist academics on this . . . because they also need transforming [laughter].

What this quotation highlights is the belief that the notion of transnational feminist praxis is a conflicting one; as much as it provokes promise it also provokes suspicion in that it is seen to perpetuate many processes of inequality. We agree that there is a need for research practices to be consciously studied in terms of dialogues that admit conflicts, silences, and differences—indeed transnational feminist praxis demands this—but this is never easy. The timelines and the agendas that operate in feminist academic circles, particularly in the North, often have little purchase in places in the South where the political spaces needed to open up dialogues simply do not exist or are not considered to be important to the context in which women's organizations operate.

While we believe it is important that northern feminist academics engage in discussions about transnational feminist praxis, this needs to be in tandem with the recognition that it is often at an enormous—political and perhaps feminist—distance from organizations such as Red Thread. Indeed, the extent to which this recognition is on the table both in the South and the North may well determine the failure or success of any transnational collaboration. What counts as "academic practice" needs to be interrogated and expanded to address this question of southern activists serving as representatives of struggles but not becoming direct beneficiaries of conversations that take place in northern academic spaces about transnational feminisms and praxis.[11] This central contradiction between transnational feminist praxis being accommodated in the neoliberal research university demands a radical transformation of northern academic feminist spaces. We argue that northern-based academic feminists cannot be engaged in transformative politics in the South, unless they are simultaneously committed to challenging academic structures, norms, and practices in their own institutions. A central task of radical transnational feminist praxis, then, is to hold academic feminists responsible for this and demand accountability from them along these lines.

Our conversations have led us to agree that one of the primary purposes of our collaborative research has been to question the nature of personal and professional relationships, and we have reached a consensus that we have to think more carefully about the research we do in terms of using it to construct more democratic practices of engagement and knowledge production between ourselves, between the members of Red Thread, between Red Thread and the communities with which it engages, as well as between feminist academics in the global North and feminist activists in the global South. Thus, we end by suggesting some practical questions that northern feminist academics who want to engage in transnational feminist praxis can address with their southern partners:[12]

- What do women in the South gain from transnational feminist exchanges? More relevant, what do they stand to lose?
- How can southern grassroots women's organizations resist the privileging of their members in relation to the grassroots community-based women they work with?
- How do the privileges of northern feminist academics create distance?
- How much of themselves are northern-based feminist academics willing to put on the line, given that they work in institutions that reward obedience and the status quo and in which connecting action and research is not often a widely encouraged cultural practice of academic production?
- How can feminist academics challenge the academic structures, norms, and practices in which they work to make them inclusive of women in the global south?
- To what extent is the increasing lack of engagement in praxis by feminist academics damaging relations with women's grassroots groups?
- How to account for the emotional labor, on all sides, that becomes invested in this process?
- What about self-reflexivity? Is it only a quest for self-validation? Is the emotional and political labor involved in its interrogation a diversion from the "real work" of daily processes of survival?

Notes

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1. Linda first visited Guyana in 1981, and over the next few years she taught at the University of Guyana in the Geography Department and in Women's Studies as well as conducting research. Through her involvement with the British Labour Party she ended up meeting some of the women in the Working People's Alliance (WPA) political party, including Karen. Karen, along with a small number of women almost all of whom were in the WPA, decided in 1986 to

start up an independent women's organization, which they named Red Thread. She has played a central role in the organization ever since, ensuring its survival. In 1992 Linda started working collaboratively with Red Thread, establishing a research team working together on a wide range of issues.

2. The Global Women's Strike started in 1999, when women in Ireland decided to welcome the new millennium with a national general strike. They asked the International Wages for Housework Campaign to support their call, who then called on women all over the world to make the strike global on 8 March 2000. Since 2000 the strike has brought together women, including grassroots organizations, in over sixty countries.
3. Given the increasing level of poverty throughout the 1980s the initial needs that Red Thread recognized were economic ones. Red Thread chose embroidery, a skill that many women possessed even if only in a rudimentary form, as an organizing tool. But their work went far beyond establishing simple projects to generate income. It was a move to develop women's groups, in a number of coastal villages, with a focus on consciousness raising and valuing women's work. Within a few years Red Thread had established embroidery groups in a number of communities, with a small retail outlet in Georgetown for their sales. In the late 1980s they proceeded to diversify their income generating projects. Recognizing the short supply and exorbitantly high prices of school exercise books, they embarked on a pilot exercise book project, moving on to community production and sale of low-cost primary education textbooks, which led to the acquisition, in 1990, of a printing press. Throughout the 1990s the press and a desktop publishing house provided a steady source of income for Red Thread. Operating on a commercial basis, they also publish educational and cultural material on a nonprofit basis. Increasingly throughout the 1990s Red Thread's attention was less on income generation and more on efforts to change social consciousness through community education. Bringing together, on a daily basis, both Indo- and Afro-Guyanese women from communities outside Georgetown, they formed an education team. The team, which has received in-house training as well as training from the Jamaican Sistren Theatre Collective, has conducted hundreds of community workshops performing skits based on issues such as women's work, child abuse, family survival, community development, women's legal rights, sexual harassment, and violence against women. They also produced a series of videos for television on child abuse and domestic violence. Along with a group of women lawyers and other concerned women, Red Thread supported the setting up of a counseling service for battered women, Help and Shelter, transforming an issue defined as private into one having a public and political status. Women in Red Thread have also participated in a national campaign against violence against women and in 1993 produced a popular radio series on domestic violence from which they developed the script for a play called *Everybody's Business*. One result has been a flood of enquiries from individual women whom they have helped to file petitions in court over sexual harassment, rape, and domestic violence. Red Thread's recognition that women's struggles have to be linked to those of other marginalized groups and concerns around social justice has also led to their involvement with Amerindian groups and environmental issues.
4. So often at the mercy of their funders and their ability to pull their support, NGOs have had their own agendas usurped in order to further the political agendas of funders, even to the extent of being used to undermine and overthrow democratically elected governments, such as the ousting of the Aristide government in Haiti by U.S.-backed forces (Pina 2007). In the context of Guyana the power of funders is evident in their ability to determine the agendas that NGOs are able to address (see also chapter 6 in this volume by the Sangtin Writers). For example, funding for raising awareness about HIV in Guyana is plentiful, but it is also tied to the ideological stances of funders who emphasize and try to sell abstinence at the expense of condom provision and sex education.
5. Employers include the University of Guyana, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Development Research Centre (IDRC), UNIFEM, UNICEF, DfID, Dr. Neisha Haniff, Dr. Mark Pelling (Kings College, London), and Dr. Vera Chouinard (McMaster University).
6. Research has focused on the following issues: structural adjustment, the construction of gendered and racialized identities, and the increasing globalization of social imaginaries (Peake and Trotz 1999; Trotz and Peake 2000, 2001); women's role in development processes, particularly in relation to processes of urban planning and housing provision (Peake 1987 and 1996); poverty (Peake 1998); sex work (Red Thread 1999); women's reproductive health (Peake on behalf of Red Thread 2000); domestic violence (Peake on behalf of Red Thread 2000); trafficking (Marcus et al. 2004); as well as on Red Thread itself (Andaiye 2000; Peake 1993, 1996; Trotz 2007).
7. We have Cora's permission to discuss these examples.
8. For example, during our training sessions we studied the latest census and the Living Standard Measurement Survey (LSMS) as well as the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES), the latter two of which are extremely important for planners and policy makers in Guyana given the lack of confidence in the reliability and accuracy of the censuses. We also studied reports produced by various international agencies and critiqued them on the basis of the women in Red Thread's understanding of everyday life in Guyana.
9. Time-use studies have also been conducted in communities by Red Thread so that they have been able to document both the paid and unpaid work women do in the family and community, revealing both the gendering and the value of the domestic production process.
10. The only organization dealing directly with issues of sexuality is SASOD. This is a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) human rights, nonprofit NGO, which started in 2003 as a university-student pressure group (then called Students Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination). Also supported by non-students, it is lobbying for the passage of an amendment to ban discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in the Guyana Constitution. Although the amendment has still not passed, this diverse group of concerned citizens, community leaders, and activists blossomed. This voluntary, informal network of individuals then decided to change "Students" to "Society" to reflect the small but growing community of support for LGBT citizens in Guyana.

11. Although many southern activists would also argue that those who do get a chance to become representatives of specific struggles in the North often return with benefits that set them apart from others who are not seen as "qualified" to acquire that status.
12. These questions arise from our own conversations as well as a perusal of various literatures and Blomley (1994) in particular.

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