Writing a global and Southern sisterhood between Indonesia and Australia: The possibilities of "difference" and collaborative autoethnography

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Abstract

The concept of feminist "sisterhood" holds an uneasy historical and contemporary relationship with difference; indeed, new ways of knowing and doing research across, within, through and between the boundaries of race, class and religion are needed to disrupt the sedentary monologism of "white-supremacist-capitalist-imperialist-patriarchy" (after hooks, 1994). Collaborative autoethnography presents itself as one such possibility for doing the work of difference "differently", and in this paper, we share the sameness and differences of our "southern-ness" as feminist academics to explore this potential. As two female academics from Indonesia and Australia, we draw upon the postcolonial feminist work of Mohanty and the poststructural, feminist scholarship of Holman-Jones, Connell and Braidotti to challenge and re-imagine notions of global and Southern sisterhood as Indonesian and Australian Gender Studies academics. Under feminist research methodology, we use collaborative autoethnography to share our "same" personal-as-political experiences as mothers and academics in Gender Studies. It is together with our "different" experiences as student-advisor, Western and non-Western women to explore the ways in which we are positioning ourselves in relation to and performing the possibilities of a Southern sisterhood. Our writings reveal that our student-advisor, Western and non-Western relationship is one replete with differences of power and privilege and yet as Gender Studies academics we are bound together by a commitment to global and distinctly "Southern" sisterhood where striving for empowerment as women is joyful. We claim that Southern sisterhood is possible. Collaborative autoethnography holds much promise in relation to an Australian – Indonesian sisterhood which travels across the boundaries of race, class, and religion. Such travels of difference entangle moments of comfort and discomfort and in this paper, we share some of the ways in which our shared subjectivities as academics plays out as difference in a relationship committed to a gender just future for women in the Global South.

Keywords: Indonesia, Australia, Southern sisterhood, collaborative autoethnography

Introduction

Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression (hooks, 2000, p. 1).And the same course's opening lectures on the history of feminism probably won't mention Raden Adjeng Kartini, He-Yin Zhen or Huda Sharawi – though those women are among the most powerful thinkers and important pioneers in world feminism (Roberts & Connell, 2016, p. 137).

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One of the most pressing issues in feminism today is the often times difficult relationship that sits within feminist bodies of experience, performativity and thought between the Global North and the Global South mediated by, through and between colonial processes of power, control, authority, domination, and oppression. Often divided by the terms East and West, feminists in both locations enact particular kinds of ethico-onto-epistemologies in relation to discussion of women in/and development, gendered roles in global institutions, gender in postcolonial theory, and the personal-is-political dimensions of feminist theory in a globalised sisterhood. In this paper, postcolonial and post-structural theoretical feminist framings (Braidotti, 2011; Connell, 2007; Holman-Jones, 2005; Mohanty, 2003) assist us to explore how while living and working Southern higher education institutions in separate locations, our personal-is-political feminist "same but different" experiences in our work as academics enable us to move towards a necessary *and* necessarily "uneasy" sisterhood of the Global South. In presenting this paper as "collaborative autoethnography", we challenge the centrality of the Global North in relation to thinking about women's, gendered and feminist experiences of working in University contexts by writing our work differently as women of the Global South. This in itself is complicated. Mufli positions herself as an Indonesian Islamic woman from the Global South embodying intellectual practices and traditions of the Global North while studying for her PhD in the Global South. Liz positions herself as a white settler colonial woman working in a university located in the Global South similarly embodying intellectual practices and traditions of the Global North, while working with a postgraduate student of the Global South. Using reflections on our relationship as conversational excerpts, we aim to provide a valuable set of insights for teaching, research and scholarship in this field that will help in understanding the uneasy but necessary personal-is-political entanglements related to claiming a sisterhood of the Global South in our life and work.

The first time we met

Mufli. *I started my PhD study in University of Queensland in 2015. My principal advisor was male – Eric - who introduced me to Liz and scheduled a meeting for the three of us. Previously, I had only communicated once with Liz by email to thank her when she agreed to be my second advisor. To be honest, I did not know much about Liz before Eric suggested her to be on my advisory team. Thinking back now, Eric did a good job, as over time, I found Liz encouraged me to "own" my thesis for myself. She trusted every step that I took; she gave me "permission" to write my chapters with my own style and to finalise them: she became my guide. In that first meeting, Liz's wide knowledge in relation to my interests impressed me. Her explanation about women in academia, which derives from her position as an Associate Professor added to my own experiences and the ways I might understand them. Having more than 20-years' experience in academia, I thought of her as a successful academic woman. I looked at her and saw an attractive woman with a slim figure, high ponytail and soothing smile; and over time, she showed herself to be kind and loving towards me. As I prepared for my PhD mid candidature review, I understood that Liz practices what I have read about ethical issues in feminist methodology, namely dialogic and relational ethics of care and trust (Jaggar, 1992). Indeed, she took care of me, trusted my capacity to finish my PhD.*

It is true though that at first I never thought that I was going to work with Liz. Similarly, I never thought that I would write a PhD thesis which falls under the category of feminism and feminist study. My understanding of feminist research methodology comes from Hesse-Biber (2007) and that feminist research methodology aims to remove unequal gendered structures and seek to change them. Moreover, feminist

research methodologies endeavour for more mutual and more transparent relationships between researchers and respondents, and the focus of such research is on women's lives (Fonow & Cook 1991; Harding 1987). I remember Liz saying to me right at the beginning of my PhD, "Why don't you write about female academics in your country/institution, as you are already an academic? You could write their experiences from an insider's perspective?" Certainly, I knew that Liz's statement agreed with other feminist scholars such as Sandra Harding's (1987) who claimed that feminist research methodology should start with women's experiences and their standpoints in order to enact change; but I was quiet. I was not sure whether it was a question or a suggestion and I imagined that if I worked on this topic, it would open old wounds from my old university—and I wanted to avoid that. Besides, my original PhD proposal related to female teachers in my hometown, not female academics. Moreover, an "insider", she said? No, I totally disagreed with her, as I felt I am "other" in my university and I did not have the courage to explore "otherness" in academia. My mind began wandering to past traumatic experience as a female academic, recollecting the ugliness and sadness. I saw myself as a senior female academic but one who faced male dominance and gender discrimination daily as the "other". I remembered how the top leader in my university I worked preferred to give more opportunity to male colleagues to further overseas study and academic promotion (Muflichah, Andriani, & Mackinlay, 2018). He made me suffer in a social and institutional environment, which limited my access and advancement in my academic profession. In 2014, when I felt brave enough, I decided to leave my hometown, end my employment in that institution and move to another university. This was a hard decision to make as I did not have any family or friends there, but I was ready to start a new life—as an academic and as a person (Muflichah, Andriani & Mackinlay, 2018, p. 80). For me, hijrah[4] *has always been the hidden blessing and it came true when eight months later I was granted a scholarship from an Indonesian ministry to pursue my PhD in Australia. Having 20 years' experience in academia, I felt I could now claim myself as a survivor in masculine university.*

To return to the story of working with Liz; one meeting and after another passed, and she was able to convince me I could do just that—I could and would write my PhD thesis using my experiences as a female academic. Since that first meeting, Liz and I met more regularly and more intensively than with my first advisor. I wonder now how and why this happened—perhaps because we were both mothers too? I think now that our shared experiences of being academic mothers enabled her to see how my PhD reflects our real life as female academics in the current context of neo-liberal higher education. It is a context, Liz (Mackinlay, 2016, p. 55) understood as an epistemic space that was deeply personal and political; she could see from her positioning as a female academic mother how writing about the way I experienced this space could be empowering.

Liz. *Before meeting Mufli, I had never worked with an Islamic research higher degree student before and I have to confess, I was nervous. Everything I knew about Muslim culture I had learnt from my engagement with debates in "whitestream" feminism about third-world women, difference and intersectionality; certainly not* with*. The work of Chandra Mohanty around the power and privilege a white-settler-colonial-cisgendered-able-bodied feminist academic like me held in relation to the kind of woman I imagined Mufli to be, reminded me of my position and sat very uneasily with me. My personal-as-political life being as family and being as researcher in relation with Indigenous Australian women as a non-Indigenous Australian woman had placed me in such uncomfortable locations before and I had learnt to trust the discomfort. Somehow this* felt *different and I was anxious about the difference. I was anxious to let Mufli know I had thought about the difference and was searching for another way beyond knowing, being and doing my work as a universal feminist who resisted differences between women – I was anxious for her to know I was not that* kind *of feminist; the kind of white middle class feminist who engages in*

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[4] *Hijrah* is taken from Arabic and means to move or migrate.

research about *women from the third world because my power and privilege enables me; and, that I was indeed – kind.*

Writing our differences: The promise of collaborative autoethnography as PhD student and PhD advisor

We write this paper in a way that seeks to disengage from what French feminist philosopher Hélène Cixous refers to as the authority of masculinist and patriarchal language, texts and discourse. We do this deliberately to actuate the Cixousian concept of écriture féminine or "feminine writing" (Seller, in Cixous, 1991, p. xxix), that is, writing which "is not obliged to reproduce [this] system" (in Cixous & Clement, 1986, p. 72). We want to take up Braidotti's (2011, p. 24) invitation to "disidentify ourselves from the sedentary phallogocentric monologism of philosophical thinking" and activate Greene's (1994, p. 109) refusal to be "swept along by what the great ones have said and remain partially submerged by them" in the way we write about our 'same but different' experiences as feminist women in higher education. For us, the process of collaborative autoethnography presents itself on our writing trip as one such possible moment of disruption and intervention. Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez (2012) define collaborative autoethnography as a "qualitative research method in which researchers work in community to collect their autobiographical materials and to analyse and to interpret their data collectively to gain a meaningful understanding of sociocultural phenomena" (pp. 23-24). At the time of writing, Mufli had returned to work in her Indonesian based institution and Liz wrote from the desk in her office at The University of Queensland. Finding and finalising the "f" words to share in between us in one written work, was filled with temporal starts and stops, as well as flows of fluidity and flexibility. In this "versioning" of collaborative autoethnography we move across and between ourselves as individuals and ourselves as two women, as Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez (2012, p. 25) posit, to collectively explore our same but different researcher subjectivities. In doing so, we hope to open up a critical and reflective research-as-writing space where the business as usual power relationships between researcher and researched might be performed differently. Given our "same but different" locations as women and academics in the Global South, both agendas are particularly important to us, as far as they enable us to fold our intersectional-personal-is-political feminist sensibilities and unfold the relations of power, privilege and positioning which sit uneasily between us. Our collaborative autoethnographic work is grounded in Richardson's insistence on conversation because, "After all, that is what close friends do-talk about their lives" (1985, p. 83).

Mufli. *Mohanty (2003) suggests that women around the world are not universal and we acknowledge that Liz and I are different in our subjectivities as female academics. In the case of Liz and I, we might be seen as polarised in terms of race (white/non-white), culture (Western/non-Western), country (Australia versus Indonesia), religion (Muslim/Non-Muslim), our position in an Australian university right now (PhD advisor/student), and our different speaking positions—our literal speaking positions. Speech, language and words - I think of the conversations we have with one another and the distinct language barrier I face when we met fortnightly to discuss my work. I find myself tripping over my words and ideas as my native tongue created a stilted broken English. My culture will not allow me to speak loudly over her, as I see her positioned—and indeed, she is positioned—as the one who holds more knowledge and power in relation to me. However, the feminist thinking of Mohanty (2003) makes it possible for me to concentrate on the problems of sisterhood across globe faced by non-White women and gives me space to present my*

understanding of these feminisms through my own critical and theoretical sense making. The work of Mohanty (2003) speaks to Connell's (2014) more recent thinking which asserts that women in the Global South experience the self, social and academic worlds differently from women in the Global North, and these differences need to be acknowledged and shared. However, revealing myself as a feminist, especially in an Indonesian Islamic context, is not always easy; and further, revealing my identity as a feminist academic through the writing of this thesis writing is harder. I asked Liz to write collaboratively with me as a way to think through our sameness and differences in writing. I still wonder then, as I write this, where that leaves my relationship with Liz.

Liz. *I like writing collaboratively with doctoral students. I think and wonder how it is an extension of our academic relationship and that writing words together enables a different kind of intellectual relationship to become – one that is guided by our thinking and wondering around similar questions, concepts and imaginings. I was surprised, immediately delighted and then uncertain when Mufli asked if we might write an academic paper together on our experiences as female academics. Where do you begin to share a lifetime of such stories, I thought, but also wondered how we might find a way to share our worlds in writing. How would we find a shared language? Would we write in Bahasa Indonesia or English? Would we write in story or status quo style? Would Mufli be prepared to speak in a feminist voice and what kind of words would we use to express our same but different feminist worlds of understanding and experience in a move towards versioning a sisterhood of the Global South?*

Mufli. *When I moved to Australia as a mature PhD student, I was not aware of feminist research and writing methodologies nor the big theories behind them. I thought I was "just a practitioner" in a Gender Studies Program because I was an academic, moreover, one who was subjected to unequal and traumatic power plays, a haunting and hostile male gaze, and a subtle positioning as Other. In the second year of my PhD, I started to understand how my working conditions were based on the big theories I studied. For example, an offer to be a guest lecture in a Gender Studies course at the University of Queensland helped me to improve my understanding about identity. When I presented my papers in conferences, I always felt that I was "different" but I had no idea why. I was clueless to the entanglement of oppressions with identity but when I read Collins' work on intersectionality (2003), I knew. My experiences as a "good Muslimah" (Muslim woman) in Indonesia compared with my experiences as an outsider Muslim in a veil in Australia, brought Collin's words into my world of understanding.*

You see, back in Indonesia, I am a part of a majority Muslim society. When I wear my head cover, people do not stare at me when I go about my daily activities in public. I can do "whatever" I want without being afraid that people would see me as an "other" to be feared or scorned. In Australia, however, everything about my Muslim and female identity was confusing and challenging. They saw my veil and asked, "Are you from Malaysia? Why would a Muslim woman pursue a PhD in Australia? Are you trying to find a way to stay here to have a 'better' life?" There were so many assumptions behind their questions and it made me terrified to speak, particularly in my kind of "broken English". The way I spoke was such a difficult negotiation for me and I tried to hide my accent every time I spoke; but I felt I failed. When I had to present an academic paper or give a lecture, I practiced long and hard the night before to make sure I spoke English well and that my words sounded like "proper" academic speech. I was worried that if I spoke incorrectly, people in the audience might assume that it was because I was from an Islamic country and/or that I was not smart enough to be speaking as an academic as a "third world woman". I felt the

same about my writing and I will never forget the moment when not one, but two male academics criticised my writing. One said harshly that I needed to improve a lot and the other one said blatantly that I may fail my PhD if that writing was the best I could do. Even at the end of my PhD when I gave my doctoral writing to a professional editor, she commented sadly, "Your English is a big problem".

Liz. *I have a particular way of working with doctoral students, one that I learnt from my PhD advisor – I like to catch up every two weeks and I like to see some writing. I don't mind what it is – two pages, dot points or poetry – writing is writing and once we have words, writing work can begin. I was keenly aware that our institution required Mufli to write in English and that English was not her first language. I desperately wanted to make it possible for her to speak in a voice that was uniquely her own as an Indonesian Bahasa speaking Islamic woman and not muted by the demands of the white-Western-colonial-patriarchal academy. Aside from writing practice, meeting together regularly in this way with words to share our knowledge and understanding. I think it might also have made it possible for our worlds to come a little closer to each other and for us to be in-relation with who we are as scholars in our sameness and differences. I soon came to know that while being a similar age as me, Mufli is similarly a mother to two sons, a convenor of Gender Studies at her university, and a proud feminist academic with hopes to change the world for women in higher education. It took some time for me to fully understand the struggles that Mufli was working to change. For example, a confronting aspect of her work in her university is the continued practice of polygamy and an issue which Mufli publicly spoken against when conducting community services back in Indonesia (Van Wichelen, 2009). Unlike me though, Mufli was studying three and a half thousand kilometres away from her children – my two boys were less than three kilometres down the road, and I would be able to wrap my arms around them and kiss them goodnight. One month here on a fellowship and five months over there on sabbatical were the longest amounts of time I lived apart from my family and I often asked myself, "How did Mufli cope?" I always made sure I had a box of tissues handy during our meetings—I was never quite sure whose tears would fall first! Theoretical guidance and methodological advice be damned, I desperately hoped my feminist-mother's heart would speak to hers and she would find her way. Despite and because of my positioning as a white-settler-colonial woman, I wonder where this leaves my relationship with Mufli? Imagining a sisterhood where things might be otherwise.*

Mufli. *I thought our relationship would be strictly divided into a supervisor-student relationship, particularly given the difference in our status and positions of power and privilege (Bloom, 1998)—at least, that relationship was the style I was thinking! I had heard from other PhD students of struggles with supervisors who did not treat their students as 'adults'. But then, I realised that Liz was just like me—a mother of two boys who is not afraid to cry, an academic who has stories of joy and pain about juggling her worlds inside and outside the university. Liz persuaded me to write about my own experiences of success and suffering, which until then, I had avoided telling—I had kept them locked safely in the corner of my heart. I was reluctant, but as I began to know more about feminist research methodology I began to see that my own story as a mother of two and as a feminist academic (must be) is revealed because it is part of the research story. On the one hand, I was reluctant because my culture does not endorse the exposure of very personal stories and experience. On the other hand, because my research is qualitative, there was an expectation of personal-is-political reflexivity of what I am doing and who am I (Collins, 2003). Remembering our similarities assisted me to find a way to share this side of my story. We are both*

female academics, we are both mothers, and we can both relate to the ways in which my PhD topic reflects the reality of our lives as female academics in neoliberal universities. Looking at my subjectivities in Indonesian higher education, my experiences as academic mothering life, I see myself wanting and yearning like Kartini because the differences are still there. I wonder as I write this where that leaves my relationship with Liz? What an uneasy sisterhood.

Our similarities within the differences: **Mothering and academic work**

Mulfi. *Sometimes in our fortnightly academic meetings, we ended up sharing aspects of our personal life such as being mothers—surprisingly, both of us have two teenage sons! When stories continue to something deeper, our eyes would become wet with embodied emotion and experience. Liz always provided a box of tissues for us on her desk. When I told her about my delay in promotion, she understood my story from her perspective as an academic woman who teaches and is convenor of Gender Studies. I remember in one meeting, Liz suggested that I could write the experiences of female academics from Indonesia and that by taking this approach, I would contribute to theory as an Indonesian female academic, a perspective which is rarely heard. I remember another time when she talked about how hard it was as a mother to have to temporarily leave her sons and travel away for work. I responded by crying; I knew how she felt—Liz and I are folded tightly within our similar ways of "maternal thinking" (Ruddick, 1980, p. 343) and embrace Patricia Hill Collins' term "motherwork" (1994) to simultaneously soften the feminist dichotomies of home and work and the ways we embrace these subjectivities. On another occasion, we were both crying about the entangled burdens of academic-mothering work – our tears of sadness held that which our words could not describe. We agreed that being academic women is hard, being mothers who are also academics is harder, and harder still is being an academic mother who dared to speak the "F" word (Lipton & Mackinlay, 2015).*

Liz. *As I wait for Mufli to arrive for our supervision meeting, I finish reading the latest version of Chapter Three. She has been writing up her theoretical framework, her understandings of postcolonial and Islamic feminism, and the ways in which these inform her study. "Postcolonial feminism", Mufli writes, "makes space for women from colonised countries to speak back from a position as silent or oppressed". She cites Mohanty, Spivak and Ghandi and asserts that postcolonial feminism provides a language to enable women faculty in her home institution to speak; women like Mufli who historically have been exploited and seen as "other" in higher education. The words are familiar in the ways in which she is speaking and writing theory rendering; familiar to me, and I reach for my pencil to begin making what I deem to be necessary grammatical corrections and suggestions for writing that "flows". But, for a moment; I pause, and hold my pencil still. I cannot be sure now what it was exactly, which turn of phrase or implied meaning. But in that moment, I become keenly aware that Mufli is writing her understanding of theory-as-female-lived experience-of oppression-of resistance in a language that is not her own, in a language that is not familiar to her, in a location which is not quite familiar enough. She is writing in English, the language of colonisers, of colonial domination, of coloniality that has always sought to oppress her and others of her kind; and it is by the (un)kind rules of this language that she will ultimately be assessed. No, this language is not kind to her; and I think and wonder what kind of work she might write if she were permitted to write this thesis in her own language. Even as I write this I am aware that I am writing on Mufli's behalf– interpreting what I think she*

is experiencing and commenting on what I think her understanding might be. How can I step away from this (un)kind of move? What kind of feedback am I to give to her today, I think and wonder, as she knocks on the door? Is a shared sisterhood of the global South ever going to be kind of enough across our differences?

I can see clearly that being positioned across, in-between, through and around different kinds of "sisterhoods" as a feminist academic is a dangerous practice of the Cixousian kind. The word "danger" is used here in honour, awe and love to Hélène Cixous to invoke on the one hand the potential such positioning holds to bring into being an inbetweenness of self and other which is at once transgressive, innovative, and empowering. On the other hand, however, it is the very inbetweenness which lays bare the possibility for power and privilege to be mis/used/represented to perpetuate and reproduce dominance of self in relation to other. For me, the thinking of Hélène Cixous, particularly her essay "To live the orange" (1994), highlights that being in-between is always already a dangerous move towards being two and being in relation—the nature of the being in that moment is intersubjective, intercorporeal and in-between.

Searching for a global and Southern sisterhood: A reflection

Mufli. *We are two women working from different positions. As an Indonesian academic woman, I embody a Southern set of subjectivities in my thinking and writing, while Liz embodies Northern perspectives, even though her country is located in the South, geographically. Both of us claimed that we are academic women teach in/about Gender Study program, but Liz embraced white (and mainstream) feminism (Jaggar, 2002), while I embraced Islamic feminism. Porter and Hasan (2003) tell me that Northern experience embraces concepts and theories grounded in Western feminism and Western concepts of the personal-is-political—a set of speaking, thinking, living and writing performativities which are not familiar to me. Porter and Hassan (2003) also enlighten me that Southern concepts that I embraced, do not encourage the reveal of very personal life and experience. It is clear that Liz and I try to create a "same but different" relationship between Indonesia (South) and Australia (North). Our collaboration attempts to re-think Northern dominance through a relationship grounded in emotion, experience and ethical "kinds" of ways to work with one another. However, despite our yearning for this "kind" of collaboration as feminist "sisters" and the enormous amount of empathy and care we offered to one another, we continually encountered the dilemma of unequal power and privilege embodied by our differences. I am reminded of Bloom who explains,*

> What then is it for feminist research to promise empathy, power sharing, sincerity, and representation when these values must pass through inequality, disappointment, and misunderstanding? What does it mean to begin to listen well when the stories offered are awkward, incomplete, and even filled with disregard for the listener? What if the stories unhinge the capacity to make an intersubjective space? (1988, p. x).

Not long after I began working with Liz, she experienced significant trauma in her personal life and was unable to work for some time. When she came back, her capacity to work with me diminished. For example, she needed more and more time to respond to my writing drafts, and sometimes she forgot that she had to give me feedback. I was in a difficult situation; I did not know whether to push and bombard her with emails, or to keep patient while wiping my tears. I wanted

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to be understanding of her difficult personal circumstances but I was frustrated and at times wondered about the kinds of power relationships taking place. My position as her student, perhaps my age and social class, as well as my presence as a non-White body, were all potential sites of domination and I knew from PhD reading that power imbalances of all kinds are part of the many challenges in feminist research (DeVault & Gross, 2007). However, I found in our everyday interactions that neither of us overtly or explicitly exercised power over each other. I saw that Liz always maintained an "equal" partnership between us; she never emphasized her powerful and privileged position as my advisor. I tried to be respectful and reciprocal to do the same. I tried to show care and empathy to her in our relationship when I knew she was struggling personally—I tried to enact the kind of Southern sisterhood we were thinking and writing about. I calmed myself by reading chapters of feminist ethics. Jaggar (1992) reminded me that the ethics of feminism is an ethics that employs feminist perspectives. Preissle and Han (2012) argue that feminist research should have position to consider, involve, and empower the women involved. In explaining this position, both authors employ an ethic of care and relationship. Furthermore, both claim that the moral emphasis in feminist ethics that is assumed to be typical of women such as intuitive, sensitive, empathy, and emotional traits perceived as weakness is empowered in the ethics of feminism as a strength. The ethical thinking of feminism is based on experience, different from traditional ethics which prioritizes the human ratio. The goal of feminism ethics is to make the world a more gender just place, even when the sisterhood is "uneasy" (Bloom, 1998, p. 52). Agreeing with Reinharz and Davidman (1992), Bloom writes sisterhood is a product of some—but not all— feminist projects rather than a requirement of the research relationship. She does not deny that there is a power relationship in a feminist relation, however, the power "is not naturally and uniformly located in the researcher" (Bloom, 1998, p. 55). Sisterhood, she insists, can and should apply to all women who have different personalities and ideologies, because sexism and misogyny are still with us.

*   **Liz.** A large sigh escapes from my lips as I pick up my steaming cup of coffee and rest it in my hands. I think and wonder how it is that I have managed to survive the personal trauma of the past two years; and then how it is my work at the university— my feminist work— which has enabled me to stand up and fight when all I wanted to do was crumble. My sigh is neither complaint nor weariness, but a sense of contentment that gives it voice; writing with Mufli about our same but different sense of sisterhood has brought a sense of freedom I thought I had lost, perhaps forever. My mind wanders to the caffeine embodied aromas that tease the inside of my mouth to Virginia Woolf. "The only exciting life is the imaginary one", she wrote in her diary, "Once I get the wheels spinning in my head, I don't want money much, or dress, or even a cupboard" (2001, p. 180). The material and affective dimensions of writing, bringing ideas prancing about on the inside to the outside through the soft touch of fingers on keys, I cannot help the smile that plays about my face, for surely this is one of the joys – writing about being a female academic, and about being a female academic mother. On cue, my now 18-year-old son Max pulls up a stool next to me at the kitchen bench.*

     "So, how's your paper going Mum?" he asks.
     "It's going", I reply, careful not to jinx my productivity with too much optimism.
     "What are you working on?"

"I'm trying to finish a paper with Mufli —I think you've met her? She's a PhD student of mine", I pause, as my breath catches in my throat. I am horrified by the possessive logic that sits there, just beneath the surface of the phrase, "student of mine"; and I quickly correct myself.

"I mean, she's a PhD student I am working with, Mufli and I are trying to finish the paper before the teaching semester starts and we are in countdown mode until the beginning of September", I explained.

"What's the paper about? No, wait", he adds cheekily, "I'm guessing you are writing about the 'f' word' in all its glory – that's what you do best!"

I smile; Max has grown up with feminist talk, is proud to be raised by a feminist mother and to engage in pro-feminist performativities of all kinds.

"Yes, but with a southern twist; it's an intellectual dance between Indonesian Islamic feminism and the kind you are used to hearing from me", I explain.

He takes a light-footed twirl around the kitchen, "So, the big question is, are your feminisms in or out of step in this story?"

I stop and stare at him. He is right—all along I have been sitting comfortably in the knowledge that Mufli and I share more than one thing in-kind: we are both women and mothers in an academic world seeking to make this *world a different* kind *of world for women. In waving a feminist flag and shouting ra ra sisterhood in this story, I have been desperate to perform what bell hooks calls the "original work of love" so that our differences might become* something different*. This is the kind of love that those of us who are moved to* move *ourselves beyond patriarchal—and white-settler-colonial—seek to find (2002, p. xix). Such love is the kind that cultivates "care, knowledge, respect, and responsibility* in relation [my emphasis]*" (2002, p. 242) and hooks further asserts that "anytime we do the work of love we are doing the work of ending domination' (2013, p. 195). Yes, this is the kind of work I think I am doing with Mufli, ending the domination between white-settler-colonial-feminists and third-world feminists; but … what if? What if this is not* kind *love at all and not Mufli's kind?*

I wonder, how many of us have felt the uncertain. Feeling never fully certain and comfortable as feminist, as mother, as academic. Feeling never fully present anywhere and feeling never fully sure if it's a dark deep hole or an adventure that we are going to throw ourselves into. It might be a place where we have become impossibly "stuck". As Lather (1998, p. 488), reminds us that being in a stuck place, is a way to keep moving "within the impossibility" and from stuck places, the search for "something other than the return of the same old" is inevitable (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 125). Is that what Mufli and I are trying to do in writing our similarities as academic mothers, I think and wonder; to put ourselves in stuck place where the similarities we search for become particular, necessary and urgent kinds of differences in a possible Southern sisterhood of the global South?

Conclusion: A conclusion which is just the beginning

Mufli. *The difference between Liz and I is somehow like the difference between mainstream feminists and postcolonial women activists, even though I know Liz is a decolonising (white) feminist. I know she often feels guilty about the unequal power relationships and privileges she holds which sit uneasily between us, and the kinds of performativities these at once decry and demand, no matter how hard*

she tried to do otherwise. However, Southern sisterhood and collaborative autoethnography present themselves as possibilities for doing the work of difference "differently" with Liz and in this paper we have shared the sameness and differences of our "southern-ness" as feminist academics to explore this potential. It is only the beginning, for as Blair, Brown and Baxter (1994, p. 385) note, "Autoethnographic texts often closely align with feminist principles by revealing the ways in which these stories are produced; discussing the author's motivations for, and emotions in, writing; legitimizing experiential and narrative evidence".

Our Southern sisterhood brings love and happiness which in turn bring us (read: Me) to success. Liz and I shared coffee together and we smiled. In her office, she gave me her shoulder, I gave her mine and we cried. We presented papers together and together we raised our same voices as feminist academics. She gave me a chance to be a guest lecturer in her classes and made space for my different voice as an Indonesian academic to be heard. We continue to write papers together, naming ourselves together as authors perhaps is one of the ultimate "sisterhood things" we might do in our academic work. As Nagar (2013, p. 4) comments, "Collaborative storytelling allows co-authors from varied locations to draw upon and scrutinise their multiple – sometimes conflicting – experiences and truths while exploring, enhancing, and elaborating upon how these interconnect with 'expert' knowledges". At any one moment, we are positioned somewhere between us between same but different feminist subjectivities; in such spaces, collaborative autoethnography presents a possibility for thinking and writing a sisterhood of the Global South.

Liz. *In writing this paper, there have been numerous pauses along the way as we negotiated mothering, family and work commitments—not least of all when Mufli submitted her doctoral thesis and left immediately to be with her family in Indonesia once more. Each time we began again, an overwhelming sense of excitement and commitment to writing ourselves as feminist women soon joined us. We came together to write our sameness-es as women who are not afraid to say and write the "f" word in academia, knowing that the very act of speaking-as-writing a global sisterhood would mean necessarily placing ourselves at the "in-between" of our differences, and being ready to name them at the very same time of being and becoming them. Our work together feels like half-done business; there are many more questions left unanswered. How do our feminist voices sound together when the words we speak are embedded and heard differently in, through and between their linguistic and cultural differences? Do the words we write tell a good enough academic story when the ways we might assemble them exist in the pull back towards traditional white-colonial-Western patriarchal writing and the push against it; and what do we do with the imbalances of power and privilege we hold? Either way, perhaps placing ourselves there is the best personal-is-political* and *feminist move we can make to continue, thinking, writing and imagining a sisterhood of the Global South.*

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