

## One More Story

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We, Rafael and Jonneke, are meeting - with the help of zoom - across borders and time zones to read the contributions to this collection and write a rejoinder. As we revisit, curate and connect these essays, we feel excitement at reading our colleagues' words. We also feel discomfort. What have we done here? What draws us to telling stories, listening to them, and reading them?

Long before we wrote these essays, we told these stories in fragments, embedding them in conversations that sometimes spanned years. Some of the stories emerged from chance encounters, introductions in beige conference ballrooms, writing sessions, workshops and panel discussions, awkward emails, twitter replies, and zoom chats... Our conversations took us beyond the world of presentable research to relating our everyday struggles, uncertainties, and emotions. Through stories we shared the excitement and anxiety of our teaching and postgraduate training, our workplace complaints, our efforts to learn and the obstacles in the way, the complicated parts of research we can't fully convey in academic writing which so often requires what Oumar Ba calls fictive certainty.

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This piece was written in conversation and collaboration with Oumar Ba, Megan Manion, Ajay Parasram, Saara Särämä, Laura Shepherd, Vinicius Tavares de Oliveira, and Gino Vlaponou. We thank Kevin Dunn and Olivia U. Rutazibwa.

So why is translating our conversations into essays so hard for some of us? Of course, we have all struggled, in different ways, during the pandemic with illnesses, grief, loss, family separation, isolation, and difficulties caring for children as schools shut down and support systems collapsed. The systemic and structural barriers we face, unequally, seem to have extended and multiplied in ways we don't fully understand yet. Like so many people, we navigated graduations and exams, unemployment and job instability, long distance moves, and workload increases. But beyond *all of that*, why was it hard? We turn to our colleagues, the authors of these stories, to help us understand.

There is something unsettling about making ourselves visible in our writing, even as we are drawn to the narrative voice. Ami asks: What are we revealing about ourselves? What “rights” do readers have to us and our lives? What should be shared more frequently? What are the implications for our professional lives? How do these revelations make us vulnerable? And yet, making ourselves visible can also feel liberating.

We speculate this unsettled feeling may have something to do with our complicated reactions to our disciplinary training. Many of us write about the discipline's abstractions, abstractions where people are framed as problems, problems for the international system, problems for “the data,” problems to be overlooked, tolerated, or solved by experts. In response, we sometimes allow our disappointments in a discipline to define and limit our visions. Early in the process of writing our essays, Paulo Ravecca, the editor of the *Journal of Narrative Politics*, warned us about some of the dangers of this: When we see ourselves as good critics of “bad IR,” we start to imagine ourselves as heroes.

And it's not just the discipline. Paulo said, “We are less interested in academics telling how things are or should be (regardless how ‘radical’ or ‘critical’ is the telling) and more interested in writing that *shows or embodies*.” But as we tried different ways of writing, freed from rigid academic constraints, some of us struggled to unlearn that didactic teacher-voice and that definite declarative tone of many scholarly texts. We learned that writing stories requires much more than a style guide and it is much more than translation. It requires a mental shift in worlds, a different relationship to certainty, to meaning, to “having a point,” as Roxani shows us. Even those who have more experience telling stories and writing stories must continually find ways to move between selves and vocabularies to navigate the academy.

Other questions come up too: When we write from our own vantage points, our experiences, how can we meaningfully name, recognize and situate the people and communities that teach us? As multilingual authors, how do we write sharply in (various forms of) the English language, how do we smuggle in ways of knowing English does not seem to offer?

There has been excitement in this struggle, this challenge of learning and relearning, of worrying and questioning. The narrative voice pulls back our curtains -- our security blankets? -- and allows us to give up the pretense of intellectual distance. Writing and sharing offered much more than a break from institutional isolation and pandemic separation; it brought community to our learning and intimacy to our collaborations. It required logistical conversations that revealed more about the everyday struggles that shape our writing: My colleague just quit! The baby woke up! A positive COVID test! An exam! There are no hours to write after the teaching day...

As we wrestle with our worries, questions and excitement from our zoom windows, Rafael locates his copy of Ailton Krenak's *Ideias Para Adiar o Fim do Mundo* (Ideas to Postpone the End of the World).<sup>2</sup> Krenak, Rafael explains to Jonneke, writes about the importance of telling stories from the context we live in, a not-so-metaphorical end of the world.



Rafael in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil, introduces Jonneke in Portland, Oregon, United States, to Ailton Krenak's *Ideas to Postpone the End of the World*

Rafael reads Krenak in the Portuguese and translates into English for Jonneke:

Por que nos causa desconforto a sensação de estar caindo? A gente não fez outra coisa nos últimos tempos senão despencar. Cair, cair, cair. Então por que estamos grilados agora com a queda? Vamos aproveitar toda a nossa capacidade crítica e criativa para construir

<sup>2</sup> Ailton Krenak, *Ideias para adiar o fim do mundo*, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2019.

paraquedas coloridos. Vamos pensar no espaço não como um lugar confinado, mas como o cosmos onde a gente pode despencar em paraquedas coloridos.

Why does the feeling of falling cause us discomfort? We didn't do anything else lately but fall down. Fall, fall, fall. So why are we in trouble now with the fall? Let's use all our critical and creative skills to build colorful parachutes. Let's think of space not as a confined place, but as the cosmos where you can drop down on colorful parachutes.



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Over the next days, we keep returning to the image of the colourful parachutes. As we do so, we recall the line from Ismália, quoted by Vinicius, “I wanted to touch the sky but ended up on the ground.” We don’t resolve our worries and questions. But we continue to name them and sit with them. We try to make time for more stories so we can learn to use our critical and creative skills. We try to make time for more stories so we can imagine different worlds into being.