

# To work and say #MeToo

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I have been thinking for a while how to speak of this, and this is not easy to speak of because there are so many of “us”, so many kinds of “us”, so many different ways of how we imagine “us”, and carry with “us” so many different kinds of trauma and pain. And, so I’ve decided to begin with kindness, solidarity and love, to all of you who are hurting because of what #MeToo reminds you of now and then again and always, because trauma learns to make homes in our bodies.

Your pain is real, and you should be able to speak of it, cope with it, deal with it, fight it. You may not want to, but you should be able to: be able to find a language for it so that you can call it what it is, be able to have someone listen to you with respect, be able to feel safe as you speak of it, be able to have the violence on you addressed. And I hear you, and I’m sorry it is so bad every day.

When I see a #MeToo post, I am reminded of intimate conversations, taken place in trust and confidence, between myself and so many formidable survivors. There is something familiar about a conversation like this, because these conversations have taken place too many times—with friends, relatives, children, employees. They have taken place in fearful dazes, with hushed tones and behind closed doors. Survivors have always found each other, in silent solidarity. Much like these posts, the point of these conversations has almost always, primarily, been about the acknowledgment of a hurt that’s been caused upon a body. We have always known about these hurts; but we have rarely ever been able to do anything about it. Children have told their parents about violations they didn’t understand yet; colleagues have always shared with each other about the ways in which their bodies have felt unsafe; friends have spoken to us about intimate partner violence in kitchens and bedrooms, over dinner table conversations even. We have listened, held their hands, cried with them. Most often, we have resigned with the knowledge that nothing can nor will be done about this.

But there are some ways in which these posts are foreign too. #MeToo posts often make me wonder how I am to receive such intimate, harsh, painful information of violence caused upon people I barely know or don’t know at all. There is something about pulling a celebrity down that is sensational. Pulling your average, everyday predatory employee or uncle—not so sensational. There is something about the world publicly dissecting these detailed accounts of sexual violence and exploitation: the ways in which someone’s trauma is investigated to find “facts” and make “judgments”. There is something about the disbelief of masses behind the idea that people so loved, popular, and cele-

brated can possibly be predators. All of these we have experienced before, known before, but today, it is a hashtag and a movement. There is something foreign about the way these familiar acts scale and become a movement.

To claim that our bodies have survived sexual violence—this is not a new, radical invention of this time by any means. We have always known, been told, and asked for help. This knowledge and those traumas have been intergenerational even, passed down in our bones. I think what is new, perhaps, is that these truths are now being handed to the world, very unintimately, and this time, the workplace and our labours have set the context for these conversations, on a digital landscape.

There are many big conversations that need to take place about the dynamics and politics of a movement like this, where survivors force the world to finally acknowledge and confront events of violence that have been allowed, perpetuated, defended by it even. We must talk about sexual violence across diverse genders, we must talk about access to this movement, and among so many other things, we must also talk about resolutions and reparations, protection and safety for survivors.

But I am also interested in how, at a time like this, we can think about our labours and workplaces, and about systemic exploitation of our bodies to the point where this has happened for so long but it has taken for us to be “work-

ing women” to make a movement about it. Yet, we have always been working, we have always been worked. How can we use our “work” for our feminisms?

It is the very exploitation of our bodies, of our biology and performativity, which has kept us in systems that have also barely kept us alive for more work. The kind of exploitation that has forced so many of our mothers to feel powerless in the homes they make, for every time they could not do anything about it when we told them we were hurt, and so they just cried with us because they were never able to do anything to protect themselves either. The kind of exploitation that gives us just enough access by letting the workplace objectify us, because “a female voice attracts more customers”, because “when you smile, the meetings will go well”, because “visibility is the trend now so let’s employ you to earn some more,” because our bodies have been systematically and constantly policed to “endure” as lesser bodies. This capitalist patriarchy beats children into “men” and “people who let men be”, objectifies bodies, and consumes desire. Our bodies are always exploited for work, and then we wonder how we got here, where they so blatantly, so truly, so really hurt us. But we were and are always hurting.

The feminisms of corporations, public media, and advertisements, and a farcical sense of power probably don’t let us see how we got here. But see: our bodies are all we have, and so it remains the

very site of exploitation. And I wonder what and who we mean, when we speak of violence over “working women”. And how much access do sexually violated bodies get in a movement led by these “working women” we imagine? And when women have previously revolted against sexual oppression and gendered exploitation at home and outside, and they have always and continually done so through time, how did their bodies work towards movements like the one we have today?

I cannot look at #MeToo outside of larger feminist goals, which must include radical rethinking of how power is vested upon some men over all others and of course, how that allows for such exploitation of all and different kinds of labour to take place at all. And I mean sexual labour too. Therefore, we must think of “workplace” also radically if we are to truly use this momentum to acknowledge all the intersections of sexual violence. Whatever transformative work we hope to do must always keep in mind the power structures we need to break, and the ways in which our bodies are made to move for survival. And precisely because our bodies are all we have, perhaps it is also time for us to radically reimagine all the labour that our bodies are made to do, and how we can labour radically.

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