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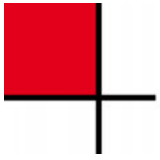
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# White fantasy, white betrayals: On neoliberal 'feminism' in the US presidential election process\*

Eda Ulus

## Opening, questioning: Feminism for whom?

In this note for *ephemera*, I discuss neoliberal, white feminism – as recently embodied in declarations of Hilary Clinton's anticipated US Presidential election as feminist glory, as triumph for women. Further, guided by the voices and analyses of people of colour (e.g., Alexander, 2012; Fernández, 2016), I call out these declarations as violently exclusive; as white feminist fantasies which sustain systems of marginalisation – including the attempted silencing of progressive women of colour on social media exchanges about US politics, women, and equality. I state at the outset my embrace of intersectional feminism, by which I refer to the understanding that women embody diverse relations to society and its structural inequalities, as experienced through their multiple identities, such as intersections of race with gender (Crenshaw, 1991; Dy et al., 2017). Intersectional feminism rejects support of political activity which works only for the privileged,

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I am grateful to women of colour academics, activists, politicians, and writers who teach me daily – among the many, @briebriejoy @goddesspamela @MuseWendi @TheWayWithAnoa @ztsamudzi. I would like to thank Dr. Carrie M. Duncan for her incisive and helpful feedback as discussant on my EGOS paper. I would like to thank Dr. Sara Louise Muhr for her caring and critical feedback and encouragement to develop these ideas further for wider dissemination. Thanks to Dr. Ishan Jalan for encouraging me to begin this work to present at the 2017 EGOS Sub-theme about psychoanalytic approaches to interrogating the 'good'. Thank you to the *ephemera* collective for all that you do, and for the honour of being able to share this space.

(white) few, and as a supporter of this movement, I have challenged the equation of a woman in power with support for the struggles of women – women who exist outside white neoliberal enclosures.

The impulse for this note is an urgent expression of this challenge, a documentation of distress in equating the *occupation* [italics to stress imperial implications] of a role with feminist achievement – without specifying what we are achieving, for whom, for which feminism. With this note, I maintain that inclusive feminism, which for me is expressed through intersectional feminist activism, is a starkly different enactment of feminism from the actions of women who reinforce masculine, corporate, imperial structures. These strivings are at best manifestations of white, neoliberal feminism, which wields violence and attempts to conceal marginalised voices and struggles.

One example of such white, neoliberal feminism, is the disturbing record of Clinton, demonstrating disregard for international human rights (e.g., Zunes, 2007; Barrett and Kumar, 2016). Clinton's history is marked by actions harming ethnic minorities and migrants (e.g., Nair, 2016) and a lack of support for LGBT rights (e.g., Schwarz, 2015; Young and Becerra, 2015) – and therefore a lack of support for women's rights and equality, if, in the spirit of intersectional feminism, we consider women living outside of white privileged bubbles, and heterosexist patriarchal norms, as deserving of equality. These, and other, instances of Clinton's legacy raise troubling – and crucial – questions about her nomination for, and anticipated US Presidency, as 'feminist' victory. I will in this note discuss and question what feminism – and whose feminism – this is. Whose voices are being excluded with these proclamations? This note advocates for surfacing contradictions between: 'feminism' that performs advocacy for women, and support of neoliberal figures such as Clinton, and seeks to probe these tensions, to pierce, to burst these white bubbles of *fantasy*.

### **Surfacing tensions between neoliberal 'feminism' and the project of intersectional feminism, through white fantasy: The unconscious is calling**

Does anything other than neoliberal 'feminism' matter? And by neoliberal feminism, in this note I mean 'feminism' as embedded within the neoliberal agenda, in which welfare states and political structures for collective concerns are undermined or destroyed, while a market society, emphasising individual responsibility and 'choice', is elevated (Fotaki and Prasad, 2015). The stranglehold of neoliberal regimes leads to consequences like 'disavowing inequalities' (Scharff, 2016: 115); indeed, 'exclusionary processes may lie at the heart of neoliberalism' (*ibid.*: 119). 'Feminism', therefore, as *trapped* within these neoliberal operations (or

experienced as liberating, for those privileged in space and time by market-led ideologies, or those with resources to seek out such spaces in the spirit of Sandberg's 2013 *Lean In* feminism) does not serve a humanitarian mission, an outreach to improve lives of women across racial groups, across social classes, across migrant status, across many dimensions of human experience. The use of quotation marks around 'feminism', in reference to neoliberal 'feminism', is deliberate, for there is a pointed, urgent questioning of what we mean by feminism, when this term is drawn into an exclusive, violent system of corporate, market-led, privileged experiences – violent, because it benefits privileged women on the backs of – and at the expense of – other women, and of men and children left behind, harmed by the operation of neoliberal agendas.

Reflecting on terms like neoliberal feminism and intersectional feminism, how can these contradictions, these tensions be explained, between: feminist public performativity, about the welfare of women and equality in society, and staunch defence of neoliberal figures and their ambitions as a cause for celebration? Celebration for whom? Who benefits from such triumph? Are we consciously aware of the feminist discourses that we invoke when we throw support behind a candidate? What *fantasies* influence our political attachments and emotional investments in discourses (Frosh and Baraitser, 2008; Gough, 2004)?

Oh, there it is! Fantasies; *the unconscious* (Freud, 1960); unconscious defences, attempting to alleviate unconscious anxieties – these resources offered by psychoanalysis paint a new portrait for understanding these bewildering contradictions manifesting on the surface (Gabriel, 1999). Unconscious fantasies to fulfil wishes, needs, desires – and the defences that are invoked, when fantasies are threatened and stimulate anxieties – these interconnecting dynamics, occurring unconsciously, provide remarkable analytic connectivity for confronting the contested meanings of feminism in daily political practices. I contend that fantasies fuel the priorities that are given to specific feminist public enactments, for instance in mainstream, corporate-supported spaces, privileging some voices and attempting to smother others – with material consequences.

And infusing into this analysis of fantasy in the US context is the crucial importance of confronting an explicit whiteness, an identification with the historical power of white systems, and therefore with triumph: *Feminism has won! The seat of power is occupied by a woman – rejoice!* Fantasy is that which is intimately threaded with our social encounters, for as Frosh (1999: 386-7) notes: '...the social is always *invaded* [author emphasis] by unconscious fantasy... what is apparently social and what is apparently psychological keep entwining with one another... social events are infused with fantasy...'. How is intersectional feminist understanding (e.g., Healy et al., 2011) – *invaded* by fantasies of feminism, by white

fantasy? The white fantasy's invasion of sisterhood, of women of colour – how might this fantasy manifest, in the 'feminist' celebration of Clinton's occupation of power, which feminist writer-activists contend has been used to advance invasive policies at home and imperialistically abroad (e.g., Featherstone, 2016)?

I propose the importance of analysing unconscious processes and white fantasy, taking as inspiration what I have been learning about intersectional feminism and the harmful effects of white feminism, from analyses by US women of colour activist writers (e.g., Muse, 2016; Getz, 2017), exposing whiteness in purportedly 'feminist' spaces. The support for Clinton as a feminist achievement for women demonstrates the ongoing damages of whiteness, upheld by fantasies, for the intersectional project of feminism, which recognises the complex oppressions that non-white, non-elite women encounter: from micro-aggressions to structurally embedded violence. In writing this piece for *ephemera*, I emphasise my positioning as an intersectional, global feminist, and as a US citizen, deeply affected by contrasting feminist discourses and attempts to suppress non-elite voices throughout the US Presidential election process. I have found intersectional approaches conceptually meaningful for building practices to support equality and emotionally supportive sisterhood, actively embracing, reaching out, seeking to learn from the experiences of the marginalised, the ignored, the excluded. Hence, I do not subscribe to, and actively challenge, neoliberal, white 'feminism' – its oppression serving only an elite few, and severely undermining the needs of most women, as well as some men (Fernández, 2016).

### The fantasy of shattering the white ceiling

As a contemporary demonstration of the problems of neoliberal feminism presented as *the* face of feminism for women's concerns, what has been disturbing to me, from an intersectional perspective, was the presentation of Hillary Clinton as a feminist achievement, in the expectation of shattering the ultimate glass ceiling. I argue that this investment – a *psychic investment* (Midgley, 2006) – of the support of Clinton reveals a narrow desire to shatter what is ultimately the *white* ceiling. The striving towards breaking this white ceiling is possible by privileged, white, neoliberal women, and in some instances non-white women with privilege to reach elite bubbles; a shattering of this white ceiling confers individual benefits to those who emerge unscathed, keeping neoliberal power intact, and causes violence in reinforcing white supremacist systems. Breaking through this ceiling, therefore, becomes a triumph only for a select group of privileged women – and for those invested in the *fantasy* of what this ceiling breakage vicariously represents in the fulfilment of their desires.

This white fantasy perpetually wounds, neglects non-privileged women – the frenzy of fantasy manifests in multiply violent ways: from indifference, to psychological-physical harm, to repeated overt betrayals of the needs of non-white and non-elite women. As argued by Chang (2016) ‘too often, shattering glass ceilings has only offered shards to the women down below’. I take this further – deep-seated fantasies for a privileged woman in the figure of Clinton to occupy a seat of imperial power, to shatter the white ceiling, violently hurtles the shards into the beings of underprivileged women, as well as men in the instances of imperial violence, and African American men in United States mass incarceration, the latter a racist system upheld by some women in power, including Hillary Clinton (Alexander, 2012).

The shards pierce human beings, tearing into the flesh, spilling blood, killing dreams, killing bodies, severing loved ones and families – this stated feminist triumph of glass ceiling splintering – sustained through white fantasy – manufactures oblivion to, and renders escape from responsibility for, past violence wielded by neoliberal policies that have damaged human lives, from domestic racist, anti-working class policies to embrace of international carnage (Eisenstein, 2016; Featherstone, 2016). Yet some feminists, women and men, on both sides of the pond were eagerly celebrating the coming of a woman through the glass ceiling, focussing on the flight of power, whiteness, and privilege crashing through to triumph, and resisting engagement with the splintering shards of pain, entrenchment of inequalities, injury, and death.

### **Disruption to followers’ ‘feminist’ fantasies: Attendant anxieties and defences**

The raw violence of Trump has received massive media and political attention, but the violence of the Clinton campaign throughout the Democratic primary process has not been named – it has been denied. Any suggestion – especially from women of colour activists and privileged allies – that Clinton and her corporate enclosures is not a feminist achievement, in the spirit of intersectional feminism – has been defended against through an array of defences, or defence mechanisms (A. Freud, 1966). These defence mechanisms function to protect the self from anxieties that arise from threats to the fantasy of upholding Clinton as one’s feminist – and more deeply unconscious, white – ideal. Such defence mechanisms include fantasy itself as a form of denial (*ibid.*), a defence against confronting lived experiences that challenge one’s own situated experience and relied-upon discourses. Further defences in the web of white fantasy are elaborated below. From a psychoanalytic framework, defences are unconscious responses to alleviate the intrapsychic distresses of anxieties, and they can operate across levels – individually (*ibid.*) as

well as organisationally and socially (Menzies, 1960; Lawlor and Sher, 2016). Defences at times can be adaptive, or mobilised in the short-term effectively for acute experiences (Gabriel, 1999), but defences may also be inhibiting, maladaptive, and even dangerous when reflexive work is missing, as with this note's position on the tragic consequences of fortifying white fantasies of neoliberal 'feminism'.

Becoming upswept in this white fantasy has manifested in stark tensions, such as silence or resistance from some feminists about potential violations of democratic process in the Democratic Party Primary of 2016, with debates about the Democratic National Committee rigging the contest for Democratic Presidential Candidate to Clinton (e.g., Brazile, 2017; DeMoro, 2016; Solomon, 2017). This Primary and its organising processes, and debates about the connection of Clinton to corporate interests (Niose, 2016) [*Corporate dominance? Whose 'feminism' is this?*], facilitated the result of the final US Presidential candidates and contributed to today's disturbing election result landscape, and attendant material consequences for feminist lives – women, men, and children, who live the misfortune of struggling outside white, elite, masculine neoliberal zones. Yet, disbelief and outrage about the US election's horrifying outcome have been *projected* by elite Democrat party members outwards.

Defence mechanisms such as projection (A. Freud, 1966) – projecting out all the painful distress of problems onto external factors outside one's own party, one's own group or organisation – provide an urgently needed analytic frame for these contradictions that bubble on the surface of discourses. For a defence to be invoked, there needs to be a threat, a disruptive anxiety (Gough, 2004).

A threat to:

The white feminist fantasy, To vicarious power, To the joyous triumph of neoliberal feminism,

may intrude as too much of a psychic injury, as too much to lose by facing one's own fantasy – and its potentially disturbing underpinning motivations. One defensive response is this projection (Gavin, 2003; Fotaki, 2006), this hurtling outward of emotional distress experienced in connection to a process or event – and with this US Presidential result, the grotesque figure of Trump was an easy source on which to project all horrifying feelings associated with the failure to usher in 'feminist' neoliberal candidate Clinton. The consequences of not collectively reflecting inward, facing the possibilities of these fantasies, are devastating.

## **Mind-boggling contradictions, devastating betrayals: Psychoanalysis offers its immense resources for social (in)justice analyses**

The bewildering tensions on the surface – between professed feminist values of equality for women, and upholding of neoliberal figures globally such as Clinton as a feminist candidate – were particularly stark in the contrast of Clinton to her opponent in the Democratic Primary, Senator Bernie Sanders. What has been painfully striking has been the extent to which some have ignored or dismissed any critique of Clinton's track record, and resisted engagement with Sanders' record of service such as civil rights activism.

High-status, white feminists in the US have issued statements against Sanders, consequently undermining their own legacy of feminist activism, and insulting the diversity and intelligence of American women – and shamefully ignoring the progressive protests of women of colour against neoliberal feminism. Gloria Steinem, for instance, claimed that young women supporting Bernie Sanders were running after the young men supporting Sanders – 'when you're young [women], you're thinking, where are the boys? The boys are with Bernie' (Bruenig, 2016), which is an essentialised, heterosexist statement of shocking exclusiveness and condescension, that shattered my own fantasy as a US citizen on Steinem's greatness for the feminist cause. An intersectional feminism, that fights for and celebrates all women – heterosexual women, LGBTQ women, and respecting women as capable of thinking for themselves – is not the feminism that Steinem was embodying with this narrow, dehumanising standpoint.

This contrast of Sanders with Clinton, of associating Clinton with feminism and dismissing Sanders' feminism, hurtles to the surface the problematic of gender binaries, in associating women's bodies readily with feminism. This binary raises questions about who is 'allowed' to be a feminist, with consequences for articulating specific feminist agendas and advocating public figures as the 'right' representatives for the feminist cause. The ready association of feminism with only women's bodies undermines one of the causes of inclusive feminist movements – to smash gender binaries because they subordinate the non-cismale, the non-heteronormative (Ashcraft and Muhr, 2018), and to relieve humanity of the simplifications of these binaries socially constructed along oppressive power interests. That Sanders was yet another white male potentially reaching the seat of US power is of course a discourse with which to contend, but to equate automatically Clinton, as woman, with feminist achievement, and to dismiss Sanders as irrelevant to women's causes, despite having arguably a strong feminist political record, essentialises women, reinforces gender binaries, and entrenches inequalities.



Bringing in a psychoanalytic perspective, the white fantasy supports rigidity of binaries, as threats to the gender binaries can unleash anxieties. A fluid, inclusive, expansive approach to understanding women's struggles and marginalisation does not fit neatly within a structured binary, by which privileged women in neoliberal systems can strive for the white ceiling and celebrate feminist triumph. Fantasies at times may interfere with responding to contemporary externalities, fortifying instead 'certain binary oppositions' (Gabriel, 1997: 330), with painful outcomes, as emphasised in this note's focus.

What can explain such behaviours and resistance to engaging with difficult questions about the potential first woman US President, and the effects of policies and actions upon women, men, children – upon communities? Psychoanalysis reminds us that formal education and training, appointed status, formal job roles, professed beliefs do not shield us from our capacity for irrationality, contradiction, betrayal of what we claim, as humans with unconscious desires, with fantasies. The resources of psychoanalysis are crucial for these social justice interrogations – by surfacing and talking about these desires, by mobilising communities to hold to account elites whose actions betray their professed beliefs, we can strive for actualising solidarity and battling inequality.

Calling out the attacks on Sanders is not an attempt to elevate any one candidate as perfect or beyond critique. Indeed, activists of colour critique Sanders and hold him to account, expressing when and why they disagree with his or any other politician's standpoint. The Sanders movement achieved incredible transformations, defying many barriers in US election processes such as mobilising grassroots passion and support, explicitly without the involvement of corporate funding – the shattering of these barriers is closely aligned to feminist aims of equality – if, this is what we mean by feminism. Why is the overcoming of these barriers not being celebrated? Why have the actions of youth activists, of people across diverse US groups been vilified instead? Is the glass ceiling the only desirable barrier to shatter for feminism, and what fantasies are indulged in focussing on this barrier?

The unconscious striving toward fantasy, as understood through psychoanalysis, satisfies emotional needs of individuals with unconscious expectations of their leaders (Gabriel, 1997), and in this note, I am explicitly connecting the unconscious wishes of followership fantasy with whiteness and power, arguing that it is a *white fantasy* that has supported neoliberal 'feminism', in contrast to intersectional feminism which strives for understanding the diverse, historically-situated experiences of women. Gabriel's work provides resonance here: 'One dominant characteristic of our fantasy life is its disregard for the endless complexities and nuances of the real world' (Gabriel, 1997: 330). The dangers of

this white fantasy call out for direct confrontation of celebrating neoliberal candidates such as Clinton as a triumph for the cause of women, when non-white, non-elite women of the real world are not included.

Psychoanalysis repeatedly calls out with its concepts, to help confront social ills and inequalities (Gabriel, 1999; Fotaki et al., 2012), which often manifest as bewildering contradictions, as that which is not rational. The avowed support for neoliberal politics, as feminist achievement, defies understanding, in that some ostensibly leftist and feminist voters defend policies which hurt people of colour, and overlook the exclusive 'feminism' of Clinton's and other neoliberal politicians' past actions (Getz, 2017; Gray, 2017), emphasising 'experience' instead. Psychic investment in discourses such as a candidate's extensive political 'experience' provides a formidable defence (Frosh, 1999) against facing grassroots concerns and marginalised encounters. It is this complicity, enacted through asserting that one must support Clinton to support women and feminism, and buoyed up by white fantasies of power – that helped to get us here.

And there's no crawling out, until we push against the currents of white feminist fantasy, conveniently serving neoliberal agendas, and drowning the humanitarian causes of a feminism that recognises the nuances of women's human struggles, from different spaces and affected in varied ways by societal structures – for me this is an intersectional feminism that is betrayed by embrace of neoliberal global power-holders, and fortified by white fantasies.

### **Fantasies through identification**

The desire to experience a woman as President may be a desire masking deeper intrapsychic strivings to align with power. The defence mechanism of identification with the aggressor (Nandy, 1982) provides an analysis of resistance to objective knowledge about a candidate, and the presentation of a candidate as feminist, by mainstream feminists (Crispin, 2017) who claim to stand for, speak on behalf of women, in circumstances very different from their own. Identification with the aggressor depicts an intrapsychic dynamic in which a person defends against the anxieties of being in a socially subordinate position – in this case, being a woman in global systems dominated by men and masculine norms – by unconsciously idealising and aligning to the more powerful player(s) in the system(s). Identifying with Clinton, with the discourses advanced by power structures within the Democratic National Committee, with Clinton advocates organising on her behalf, eases the anxieties of subordinate status. In so doing, the white fantasy, in this instance as materialised through support of Clinton, becomes

less about celebrating a feminist achievement, but instead more about riding the white wave into power, and achieving psychic delight through this identification.

The support for Clinton to be the first woman US President – and therefore at this stage the most powerful person of the world – also fulfils a fantasy of defeating misogyny. If a woman can break the imperial white ceiling – the height of global power – the impossible has been accomplished, and we can celebrate – *We Made It!* – an unconscious satisfaction that then relieves responsibility for the more difficult, day-to-day struggles of multiple oppressed groups of women. Surfacing this psychic investment is crucial from an intersectional feminist perspective, as a movement against violent inequalities in *all* forms – including imperial violence. The devastating celebration of a candidate who has not called for different ways of relating and being in the world begs for our difficult, deep reflections and surfacing of troublesome fantasies.

Profound social transformations are needed to change the masculine structures that are kept intact when women climb to positions of power, but the anxieties of doing this hard work are diminished, when the fantasy fixates on the notion that a woman has defeated sexism by shattering the white ceiling. Longing for this fantasy of triumph fulfils narcissistic feelings of satisfaction, through identification with the aggressor. I draw upon HF Stein's (1997) analysis of identification with the aggressor, as expressed through the example of working hard, in attempt to defend against organizational downsizing; tragically, it is a 'defense that works for the short term [and] is powerless to influence the long term to which it submits and, more ironically, is complicit in bringing about' (HF Stein, 1997: 244). Adapting his analysis to this context, of identifying with the white feminist fantasy as manifested in the candidacy of Clinton, the defence satisfies desires by psychic lifting of anxiety and generation of hopeful fantasies, but it ultimately fails in supporting long-term intersectional feminism and is complicit in entrenching mainstream, neoliberal 'feminism', which, from the standpoint of intersectional understanding, undermines commitment to the needs and rights of all women and equality in society.

Narcissism is a central dynamic to consider (Gabriel, 1997) for probing the organising processes of followers in relation to the idealised feminist candidate. There has been analysis of the dangers of Trump's narcissistic leadership for the future (M. Stein, 2016), and I argue that a focus on followers and their fantasies about leaders, with the resources of psychoanalysis emphasising unconscious processes (Freud, 1914), enriches our understanding of the path leading to the tragedy of the Trump US presidential victory and its horrifying aftermath. I encourage applying an analysis of narcissism to *followers*, not just to political leaders – what narcissistic desires are satisfied by aligning with leaders (Gabriel,

1997)? The agendas of corporate, neoliberal feminism, in reaching materially or vicariously the pinnacle of masculine systems – but not challenging these systems – confer narcissistic satisfaction to the privileged, through identification with the aggressor. In consequence, feminist projects – specifically, work that serves intersectional aims for the lived struggles of women from diverse groups – are undermined, and viable political contenders and people advocates like Nina Turner (Meyerson, 2017; Stockwell, 2017), Bernie Sanders, and similar progressive politicians, with documented social justice records, are suppressed, with heart-wrenching outcomes, intensifying existing social inequalities and ills.

### **Inspiration from writings and activism of People of Colour, to make a psychoanalytic contribution to organisational and postfeminist literature**

There have been searing, incisive analyses of the front of feminism in Clinton's campaign and neoliberal Democratic organising, using the term of feminism for personal gain, while masking a history painting a different picture (e.g., Featherstone, 2016; Muse, 2016). Yet, these outstanding analyses by feminist progressive activists, women of colour, have remained on the fringes, while denial and other defences on Clinton's behalf following her defeat abide in mainstream channels. A psychoanalytic perspective invites discomfiting, but crucial questions about social tragedies and their underpinnings. This work represents an attempt to articulate in academic space emotional distress that I have experienced throughout the US Presidential Election Process, analysing the connection of fantasies, anxieties, and defences to US election organising processes, and the expression or suppression of voices in social media political discourses.

It is my hope, building upon the space offered by *ephemera* with this note, to elaborate in further research on the intricacies of these unconscious processes as connected to contemporary feminist discourses, with the long-term aim of injecting more frequently a psychoanalytic understanding into organising processes and whiteness of neoliberal feminism. I hope this piece contributes to emerging attention in management and organisational studies about the complicity of the elite in contemporary organising, inspired for instance by the work of Chowdhury (2017), and this note emphasises challenging elite complicity of those who work for, or are identified members of ostensibly 'good' organisations, such as the Democratic party, for their role in enabling tragic effects upon individuals and communities.

In our academic endeavours, we can create more space for analyses of contrasts between professed and performed leftist, feminist, humanitarian expressions, and enacted, defended realities on the ground that may betray their aims. Bringing

psychoanalytic resources more frequently into these analyses, provides potent opportunities to make sense of, and take action on, these contradictions, thereby contributing to the importance of psychoanalysis for management and organisational research (e.g., Gabriel, 2015; Prasad, 2014; Muhr and Kirkegaard, 2013; HF Stein, 2008). Interweaving analysis of racial dynamics with these contemporary feminist concerns, through the resource of unconscious processes and *fantasy*, contributes to debates about the concept and use of postfeminism and neoliberalism in analyses of work and organisations (e.g., Gill et al., 2017; Lewis, 2014), and analyses of women located outside the mainstream of their work contexts (Śliwa and Johansson, 2014).

With regard to postfeminist literature, Scharff (2016) has contributed analyses about the ‘psychic life’ of neoliberalism, focussing on the subjective experiences of a group of young women workers; Scharff’s analysis does not take a psychoanalytic perspective or make reference to unconscious processes. My note is hopefully active support for interweaving the richness of psychoanalytic resources into contending with our complex lived experiences and the varied feminist discourses deployed to make sense of and respond to them.

Connecting to analyses of the meanings of postfeminism and contemporary struggles (Gill et al., 2017), I propose explicitly probing societal dynamics of whiteness and its fantasies in relation to these unfolding debates. Gill et al. (2017: 230) discuss the concept of postfeminism as ‘a disavowal of any need for radical social transformations of gender’. I advocate for asking: What *psychic functions* do these disavowals serve within racial structures? How can *unconscious* processes, notably *anxieties* and *fantasies* interwoven with racial dynamics, be addressed through sustained, difficult, in-depth exploration? How does *whiteness*, with its embedded structures and reinforcement from fantasies, manifest in the current debates about feminism in contemporary spaces, even when not explicitly named? How can our writing in academic and activist spaces decentre Anglo, American, Euro-centric writing and focus, to work with these questions in expanded, intersectional, global ways? What might we gain from doing so?

## Concluding, and opening up

This note begins and concludes, and opens up to more, through inspiration by women of colour and progressive writers, activists, academics, community members – their work prompts reflection on how they are affected by, and what we collectively as humans lose, in privileging white, neoliberal feminism in public spaces and discourses.

Two encounters are highlighted here, in hopes of connecting the concepts of feminism and psychoanalysis that I have attempted to explore in this note for *ephemera*. These exchanges focus on Clinton as the recent embodiment of debates about women and inequalities in neoliberal zones.

The first one:

A sharp recent illustration of Clinton's response to the needs and concerns of African Americans is shown in a video of Ashley Williams, an African American Black Lives Matter protestor's civil disruption to an exclusive, expensive campaign gathering, resulting in Clinton's callous dismissal of this protestor who raised crucial social issues (Helm, 2016; Gosztola, 2016; Miller, 2016).

How might white fantasies relate to these encounters?

The second one:

Professor Donna Murch (2016: 89) begins her chapter, 'The Clintons' war on drugs:

Why black lives didn't matter', with this passage, in which she introduces the encounter, shares the words of activist Daunasia Yancey, and continues with her analysis of the significance of these interactions:

In August 2015, an uncomfortable encounter between Black Lives Matter (BLM) protestors and Hillary Clinton finally broke the silence of many mainstream press outlets on the Clintons' shared responsibility for the disastrous policies of mass incarceration and its catalyst, the war on drugs... After expressing her ardent feminism and pride in meeting a female presidential candidate, BLM's Daunasia Yancey forcefully confronted Clinton about her shared culpability in America's destructive war on drugs: [the italics refer to Daunasia's Yancey's words addressed to Clinton]:

*"You and your family have been personally and politically responsible for policies that have caused health and human services disasters in impoverished communities of color through the domestic and international war on drugs that you championed as first lady, senator and secretary of state."* Yancey continued, *"And so I just want to know how you feel about your role in that violence, and how you plan to reverse it?"*

Yancey's question deftly turned Hillary's use of her husband's presidency as political qualification on its head: If her term as first lady deeply involved in policy issues qualifies her for the presidency, then she could be held responsible for policies made during those years. (Murch, 2016: 89-90)

How does white, neoliberal feminism thrive by attempting to push discussion about these encounters to the margins?

How do fantasies, anxieties, defences – key unconscious processes – mark these relational dynamics?

...

### **Looking back, yearning forward**

Of course, I want to see women occupy positions of power – to experience a woman as President of my birth country. And, as a feminist activist academic, I want women who are intersectional in their approach – for me this effort strives to work with the marginalised. I hope for women who dare to challenge entrenched systems, to be the ones who rise to power. I embrace women devoted to struggle. I bow down in respect and gratitude to Nina Turner. To Pramila Jayapal. To Kshama Sawant. Why aren't these women household names like Clinton?

Why indeed.

I embrace and desire for women to be my leaders, who do not simply rise through ranks to enjoy and reinforce American white systems. Women of courage. I celebrate women and men who use power to fight for justice.

I do not, will not, rally behind essentialised notions of women, to reinforce existing inhumane systems. I wish to challenge fantasies that help to keep gender binaries intact. Does this not undermine feminism – to limit what we can critique and challenge, on the basis of biological gender?

Do not call this feminism. Or at least call it for what it is – neoliberal feminism, corporate feminism... but for me, this is perverting the use of the term.

Call it power. Call it whiteness.

Call it white fantasy, which claims to care for women beyond elite clubs but evidences actions to the contrary – this is not my feminism.

Enough with these perversions.

Call it control. Call it neoliberal self-interestedness.

But don't dare to call this support of Clinton, of neoliberal power circles, feminist.

This is not my feminism. This is not what women and men of colour, what LGBTQ individuals, intimately connected to their communities and fighting against barriers at the grassroots, doing the hard work, are teaching us.

If only we would listen.

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