



Call for papers

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Abstract

Somewhere deep in the heart of Texas a pandemic settles in, a son finally takes his nap, and a feminist geographer receives a call for papers.

Keywords

Care; COVID-19; feminist geography; social reproduction; mental health

Dear Editor,

Thank you for this call for papers on the economic geographies of COVID-19. What a great idea. Research articles, not opinions, up to 8000 words by April 19th? Three weeks from now? No problem! As you note, the AAGs *are* cancelled, so we'll have plenty of time to devote to this. I'm raring to go.

You didn't list this as a possible line of inquiry, but I have a brilliant piece in mind on how the virus will deepen entrenched gendered, racialized and ableist inequalities via caring labor, its devaluation and invisibilization.

Small ask: to meet that deadline, could you download all twelve seasons of Paw Patrol and ship me your laptop? I'll text you the address. It's \$21.99 a season, sound OK? While we wait on that, and so our teacher keeps getting paid, could you log into the three daily Facebook events she offers? You should mute the video though; my son won't actually participate. He'll be building his den empire. There'll be at least ten different versions. Can you assist with, say, eight? Please note that **YOU HAVE TO USE ALL THE PILLOWS** and you can't tell him what to do, even if in your boredom, you get into the architectural audacity of your own den plans. No sneakily checking emails on your phone, which anyway will need charging. Instead, you must **LOOK AT HIS EYES ALL THE TIME!** while he tries and fails, with piercingly loud frustration, to balance the blanket on the sofa cushion on the armrest cushion on the



bed you just made for the fourth time this morning. Oh, and it's 6am. It's demanding, but he's so fun. You'll love him! And that will make up for it.

Now you've carved out some time for me...let's see. I'll begin with a discussion of the gendered labor of care. Start classic, why not. I'll aim to reach all those "parenting through the crisis", assuming a straight, white, middle-class but nonetheless frazzled audience of geographer mums. I'll try to appeal to the geographer dads out there as well. I know, I know it's hard on you too. I'll be drawing here on some of my favorite Marxist feminists, those who've worked tirelessly to document women's "second shift" and how their male colleagues benefit while they keep up the appearances of Doing It All! COVID will be my dramatic entre here. Cue those worried Chronicle op eds, the working-mum stock photo, and those scatterplots of stalled careers. Of course, this is age-old, extensively documented, and feminists have been talking (amongst themselves?) about it for ages. It should go quick.

On reflection (wow, all of this new space to think!) I must also attend to the *intergenerational* caring labor of COVID. Sandwiches, yes. I'll go transnational and dip into De Silva's recent bit on elder care, being sure to pay homage to the older feminist work on ageing (haha, new found wit). While I parse out those thoughtful, so resonant lines, could you check in on my mum? She's 73 (but looks a decade younger!) and needs help figuring out how to get her newspaper delivered. She's in another time zone, and wants to "do it on her own". Which means you'll need to call her, then set her up online, then teach her how to move the mouse over the icon with the arrow, no not that one, does that look like an arrow? The one on the left, on the *left* mum! Thanks for that. You'll sign up for the wrong Telegraph because guess what, there's one called The *Daily* Telegraph in Australia, and turns out they take my credit card, and then you'll sign up for the wrong kind of delivery ("not online darling, *to my door!*"). But you'll clear that up. Best thing to do then is just wait for 9am U.K time (that's 3am here but you'll be up with my son building dens so no worries) to find and call a local newsagent in her village and offer to send a check. Now I'm not sure where my checkbook is, but after 2 hours of frantic searching you'll realize, of course, that American checks are of no use anyway to a rural British newsagent. It's OK you have a lot on your mind. You left the fresh milk in with the coffee mugs by the way. In any case, can you give my brother in England a quick call and ask him if he wouldn't mind, given he's the favourite child and let's face it the only one in the family with cash, sending a *cheque* on my behalf? You'll need first to talk through the last row we had (I was right) and make sure he *feels heard*, but that should do it. I so appreciate your work to keep my mum from "just nipping to the shops!" Now the paper's secured, she'll be sending crossword puzzle clues daily. "Sweetheart can you help?" She'll say. "5 across. Atomic number 31. Seven letters. Blank, blank, L. Blank, blank...blank M. Got it?" Pandemic, what pandemic? Since I'm so engrossed in my work, could I ask you to respond? Ideally with a newsy update and some vague but hopeful note about when I'll start trying for my second. Clock's ticking you know and she *worries*. You'll get the hang in no time.

Of course, any discussion of caring labor must recognize the intersectionalities of power that operate, in part, through the very mechanisms of care itself. No economic geographer of COVID worth his salt would ever forget that! So, while I open by recognizing the differentiated burdens of care for "men" and "women", I must turn to postcolonial feminism to complicate these reductive subjectivities and attend instead to the always-interlocking structures of racial, gendered and classed power. I'll of course draw on Crenshaw here, then take up some of the classic, still urgent work on immigrant nannying in geography from England and Pratt, Lowe and Gregson, Raghuram, Yeoh and Huang. Linda McDowell's lovely and frankly still-pissed-off commentary in EPA from a few years ago will be vital, as will Brennan's work on sex tourism in the Caribbean and Mollett's on the colonial residues of other kinds of caring labor in Central America. Hmm this is complex work, I'll need some time...Sigh. By now you've perfected the three-minute shower, the Ender Pearl teleportation and the art of the toddler

deal, but of course you must get back to your own editorial things. I do understand the pressures you're under. You've got that production line to maintain, referees to find (good luck), junior faculty to shepherd to tenure, and those pesky impact factor goals to meet. And of course, the moral epistemological drive to produce Knowledge. An enticing CFP like this checks many boxes. But one last ask before I lose you:

Could you find me a nanny?

You could try the provider my university contracts with, but let me text you the URL. Their business name evokes a sunrise serenity but you won't want to google it unless you're ready to reconcile *your* need for care with their exploitative, anti-union practices, their corporatization of childcare via neoliberal universities keen to look feminist while they conveniently contract out parenting, and their colonial spread across the global south via the allure of western (that is, white) charter-based model of education. There'll be some guilt, but it will pass quickly enough, and the distraction of registering on your phone (because, you know, the kid has the Paw Patrol going on the computer) will counter the brief moral hit to your gut. It will need charging. Actually, they'll want social security numbers and you'll struggle to find, ahem, a good nanny right now. Few will show up now that we're stuck with this do-your-bit-and-stay-at-home nonsense. Instead, could you spend a few hours texting friends and friends of friends and hitting up the academic momma sites for this area to find a precariously employed, ideally undocumented, women of color who will forfeit care of her own baby to come and take mine off your hands for a bit? She's more of a domestic really. You can ask her to do a little light cleaning on the side, which will be good for her anyway since the 2-happy-birthdays-handwash is an aspiration rather than a reality for my grubby son. She does live with and care for her diabetic grandma but she'll need the money and, anyway, it's allowed. We're "surging" but not surging *enough* to be in lockdown silly. Thank goodness our Governor runs a "Right to Work" state. You'll disapprove of the fact she has to take two busses and a Lyft to get here, her failure to social distance is just making it worse for the rest of us after all. But you'll tell yourself doing so enables me to work, and my work *matters*. You're not being racist, sexist or classist because, you know, *the work*. Funny thing, it will take you a couple of hours to locate and coordinate your nanny, and you'll need a nanny to give you that time to do that. A Mobius strip of impossibility and possibility. Hmm, perhaps my piece should bring in some of Secor or Nast's fabulous feminist psychoanalysis....

Which reminds me to say, if you're feeling anxious, don't worry! Try obsessively googling "COVID-19 UK" and desperately searching in the first, say, 15 pages for hopeful headlines: "UK rolls out 100,000 tests a day!", "pandemic over just in time for the cricket!" or, less likely I know, "Boris recovers, emerges competent!" No hits yet but have a go. It will either resuscitate or more likely, deeply mess with, your sanity. While you're at it, I'll certainly be attending to the emotional geographies of COVID in my fifth paragraph. I'll use therapeutic feminist methods to think through the ways that LGBTQ students stuck at home re-navigate their homophobic parents, and how DACA students deal with the deft political use of the pandemic to deepen xenophobic sentiment against them. I'll take on, at once, both the huge rise in student anxiety, depression, obsessive behavior, and suicide, and our universities' feigning narrative of care as we "move online". My anchor will be the feminist crip work out there on ableism, mental health, and this nation's shameful disavowal of universal health care, which I'll beautifully dovetail with something good on the digital neoliberalization of academia. My solution? I'll draw from one of my fave feminist geography collectives to call for "slow scholarship" in the time of COVID-19.

My sister will probably call while I'm digging in here, could you take that? She's trying to cram twelve years of professional training on neuro-atypical therapies in by the end of the week now that her son is cut off from the specialist school he waited four years to get into. You won't be on the phone long (she's apparently "busy" and it will die) but you'll still need a drink afterwards. God she's exhausting.

But by then it will be noon and it's fine, there's plenty of memes promoting day drinking right now. In fact, it's a perfect time to nip that desperate two-decade quest for sobriety in the bud. I've ordered you a case of Chilensis and a bottle of Scotch. It'll be on your doorstep within the hour, did you know they're delivering now? Wow, look at that...Seems I've blown through mine. Again. Thank goodness alcohol is an Essential Service!

Speaking of self-care, I'll definitely include a section on its importance. It's a feminist imperative. While I write that bit, could you google highly rated meditation apps or YouTube yoga channels, something free ideally? Personally, I've got quite into yoga you can do in four minutes while your kid turns on all the lights, blows out your candles and sits on your back. It's a thing. But wait, silly me! You won't have time for that. Instead you can just imagine doing it in the time after my son finally passes out (945pm) and just before you do (18 minutes later). While you sleep, I'll note the word count for my piece is getting up there. I'll never meet it if I go into the self-care stuff. Contra good feminist praxis, you *can't* do it all! I'll be scrapping that from my searing analysis but you're still welcome to that whisky shot (or three). You'll need it!

Back to work. McKittrick's *Plantation Futures* and Katz's *Countertopographies* will push me at this point to think about the grounded connections across place and time that position people in linked but asymmetric relationships to colonial, racial, gendered, classed, heteropatriarchal power. Daley, Noxolo, Mullings, Mollett and Kinyanjui – they'll be useful here too. I'll look to them all for a postcolonial analysis that links imperial 18th and 19th century exploitation to its 20th century counterpart: the neoliberal restructuring and brutal IMF debt payments that have devastated global south healthcare systems, leaving them faced with a pandemic they have so few resources to respond to. We think it's bad here! I'll throw something in from Nixon about "slow violence" and then, to cut through all the doom and gloom, I'll write some inspiring prose about "resilience" and post-COVID feminist futures.

Goodness, I am moving myself to tears. This deserves my devoted time. Could I ask you to read and respond to the four WhatsApp requests on my phone from my colleagues in Uganda? It will need charging. Their government responded early, and they're closely following lockdown rules unlike our spring breakers, bless them. But they have families and communities to support and, can you imagine, they don't get paid if they don't work. Could you figure out my Wells Fargo password, it ends either with two !!s or 1\$, and look at my bank account, and my upcoming bills, and see how much I can send each one? Remember my mum is going to need the internet access, I have our whisky and the childcare to budget for, oh and the mortgage. Don't count on any of those puny merit raises, or the "diversity" ones that earnest faculty group wasted all their time fighting so hard for. They've both been frozen as our university "tightens its belt". After all, we must *share* the burden. Together. All of a sudden. While you're at it, for some reason, there's a bunch of new money sending apps out there, so I'd appreciate you taking just a moment to do some research on the least scammy ones. And make sure they have an office within, let's say, 10km of where my friends in Kampala live. They'll be on foot. Not a priority though, focus on those dens. They'll figure it out. They always do.

We're economic geographers, so it's essential I weave these embodied experiences of "caring amidst COVID" (there's the title!) into the wider structures of society. Pratt and Rosner's elegant conceptualization of "the global intimate" will be vital here. It's my go-to. I'll sit with Gilmore and Ramírez, Roberts, Wright and Reese, Torres and Mollett, Cowen and Roy and their wider community of vibrant minor Marxist, antiracist, and decolonial feminist geography to better understand our military-inspired and failing supply chains, the pernicious privatization of the NHS, corporate profiteering on the backs of overcrowded imprisoned labor, South African slum evictions, stock buy-outs and too big to fail airlines, and generally how these settler-colonial presents reek of past capitalist appropriations and

aggressions. I'll insist we reckon with the medical ships and luxury hotels that lie empty while the unhoused and sick die in alleyways and hospital corridors. And I'll puzzle over why such an "equal opportunity" virus seems so to love destroying Black, Brown and Indigenous bodies, the poor, the incarcerated, and the detained. Are we *really* all "in this together"? I'll muse.

I'll need to find space in my schedule for this, groundbreaking, section. Could you find and send my other sister and her NHS nursing team some face masks and rubber gloves? They've got some, but they're a few miles down the road in some warehouse waiting for "management" to decide who gets what. They're just district nurses seeing palliative and suspected-but-never-to-be-tested-COVID patients that the hospitals can't accommodate so they're technically "frontline" but somehow not "essential". Still her whining is distracting, and it would clear my mind for my very important intervention if I knew that was taken care of. Having trouble sourcing masks on Amazon? What are all those factory workers in Wuhan, the so-called "surgical mask capital of the world", doing with their time?! As my mum says, if you want something done, do it yourself. Obviously, I'm busy being brilliant, so could you search the web for how to craft surgical masks and 3-D printed eye shields? Then make them and then ship them to my sister for me? She did need ten sets (they can reuse them, you're busy!) but now four of her team are off "sick" with dry coughs and temperatures, so I guess six will do. Clearly taking advantage of the situation. I did hear there's a wider shortage, even if lots of nurses are pulling sickies, so while you're at it could you print another, say, 4 million? We could do with a few more nurses too. God knows why no one wants to sign up when you get to serve your nation for an average of £22 grand (£8 grand more if you stick at it for 35 years!) Anyway, who needs a "living" wage when you get that nationwide round of applause every day? And during prime telly time! So, could you train a few up while you're at it? If they ask about inflation, that tiny and diminishing fuel subsidy, or those stolen pensions just hush them soothingly and remind them - they're *our heroes*. Little joke there, training nurses is the work of the government, *formal work*. Don't bother your pretty head about that. But I will weave that bit into my own structural critique of British austerity. I like it.

Now while I'm doing the real work, and once you've finished those masks, could you master VimeoPanoptoYuJaSnagitCamtasiaProctorio or whichever self-cast-student-monitoring-suite feels most "You" to pre-record my 14 remaining lectures and "retool" my class exams? So many tech solutions emerging from this pandemic. Silver linings all around! Just be sure to find a way to mute out the sound of a child screaming for their fifth HOT PEANUT BUTTER TOAST! of the day while keeping your own voice very calm, clear and audible. And don't fret if this brave new world of teaching makes you nervous, it doesn't really matter how the lecture goes. Half the students will be so numbed by their new 18 hour days of screen time they won't be paying attention, and the other half won't even show up. Too busy helping their parents "pay rent" or something. Always with the excuses. Oh and while you're online, could you take on a few of my Zoom meetings? I've taken to calling them "Zootings", it's bound to go viral (can we say that yet?): There's one on how to use Zoom, how to prevent Zoom bombing, how to "flip" my class for a pandemic pedagogy, how most effectively to gaslight yourself into forfeiting, to Zoom, the remaining vestiges of your privacy, and of course, how to grade in a crisis (no giving all As, we have standards!) Duo's Multi-Factor Authentication will weevil its way into your now-regular nightmares, but still, my Provost's keeping track of how many we host, so that would be super helpful. Tenure review is coming! If you sub a few of those for me, I'll have time to write my devastating conclusion. If you mute the audio and video no one will know you're making dens. They don't need your self-righteous opinions anyway. Just to know that they organized a meeting and you "came".

I like to close with acknowledgments, it's good practice. I'll be brief, I know I kept you busy caring for me and my loved ones so I could write my article. Thank you. Just to be clear, I won't actually acknowledge you *in writing*. There's no academic convention for that. Instead I'll keep it simple and do

the usual thank you to “three anonymous reviewers”, by which statistically we mean at least two more women doing unpaid and unrecognized labor. But I don’t have time to go there, and that fact is thankfully hidden by their “anonymity”. I’ll modestly assert that all errors are my own.

For a moment, I’ll wonder what my job is, as an economic geographer in these dark days of crisis. Certainly, we must understand what went wrong, who suffered more. We must contemplate the devastating cumulative and now immediate effects of industrialized agriculture and its novel zoonotic leaps. Of global austerity and its devastating capacity to create, from those incipient viral moves, a monstrous pandemic. Of how a disaster capitalism, a *disaster colonialism*, was mobilized yet again. Beckoned this time by a predictable, indeed predicted, outbreak of disease, rather than some other not-so-natural natural catastrophe. We must ask “who is accountable?” Because, certainly, someone, something is.

Those analyses are vital. But do we need that call for papers *right now*? Just as we meet that not-at-all-flattened peak of “the curve”? That is, the moment when we start to learn of friends and students who have lost loved ones, and then that moment when we start to lose loved ones ourselves? Perhaps, I think, we do need economic geographies right now. But we won’t hear the ones I want to tell, and those of so many others, if we don’t make space for the work of care that makes them possible, *and with which they’re always bound*. We cannot escape the profound geographies of care even if we refuse to see their labors. After all, on whose stolen backs are the seeds of that toxic industrial agriculture planted? What demands of body work, of social reproduction, of love do these newer vagabond capitalisms make? Who will mind the baby so careers, economies, and bodies can be resuscitated? What failures of feminism surface when our angst begins and ends only with ourselves? And what new transformative solidarities might form: feminist, crip, queer, antiracist, from these times – if only we care, we protest, enough? Perhaps, I’ll think, this call for papers will pass me by because this must be, instead, a time for care. For caring for our students, our loved ones, ourselves, and for those directly affected by and protecting us in the face of this pandemic: cleaners, truckers, grocery store reshelvers, virologists, teachers, surgical mask makers and nurses like my sister. They might be longing for days like mine, holed up at home with infuriating, adored loved ones. Grappling only with unfinished things, not unfinished lives.

But I won’t *write* that, gawd no. I have so much to say, and you are doing such a good job with that den. I have a few other jobs that need doing. But that should carve out just enough time to put this together for April 19. No problem.

After all, the AAGs are cancelled.

Acknowledgments

I recognize the irony of writing and publishing this piece and creating caring labor for others to do so. Thank you to my editors Jack Giesecking and JP Catungal for their openness to the form, and forgiveness for my unfair reliance on their role as a foil for far more complex, structural things. Four reviewers, Ann Bartos, Sarah de Leeuw, Kate Derickson and Jenna Loyd, along with several colleagues and friends in the UT Feminist Geography Collective and beyond provided solidarity and a push to just-get-on-with-it via their rigorous, critical engagement. I play with foundational feminist book and article titles throughout without citation. I hope this will be understood as fitting with the letter premise, and a practice of appreciation not appropriation. All authors are cited below. Anton Dochtermann, Destinee Wilson and Minecraft PE gave me space to write, Jamaica Kincaid and Binyavanga Wainaina, the satiric aspiration. Last, thank you to my funny family for reading so many versions, and with generosity. Can someone *please* tell dad to change his Facebook post? It’s coming out in ACME that’s an *m*, not an *n*?

It's the *leading* international journal for... Oh forget it. I love you all. P.S. The answer is GALLIUM and, yes mum, I googled it.

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