

Pushing Boundaries: Reflections on the 2022 International FEMGEOG Conference

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Abstract

The following paper discusses and reflects upon the practices of organizing and attending the 2022 hybrid International Feminist Geography Conference (FEMGEOG), held in a range of physical and virtual locations and settings and across time zones. Through a series of short reflections written by members of the organizing committee it considers the practices of conference planning and organization alongside people's experiences of their involvement and participation at different stages of the endeavour. The title of the conference, *Pushing Boundaries*, represents how the ethos and organisation of the conference sought to push against pandemic related travel restrictions, academic hierarchies of knowledge production

and the financial inequities of conference attendance. It aimed to foster new means of connection, community and ways of relating to each other, and our research, through its international, multi-hub format. The paper also discusses the tensions and difficulties of organising an event of this kind, with reference to workload, funding and the technological demands and competencies required to foster inclusivity and connection. These reflections work as a means to provide advice and support for feminist geographers in the development of similar, future events.

Keywords

feminist geographies, feminist praxis, conference, solidarity

Introduction

Connection at a Cost

Amy Trauger, University of Georgia, US.

As I sit down to write this essay, I recall the early hope and optimism amongst the conference organizers that fuelled our collective desire to host an event that was unprecedented in its accessibility. For many of us, some more than others, the Covid-19 pandemic condemned us to spaces of isolation and disconnection from the things that nourish academic—and human—life. From the very first meetings, the core group of organizers generated feelings of positivity and enthusiasm for restoring connections through the new tools the pandemic had forced us to pick up and learn how to use. It was a formidable challenge. But we were eager to transcend boundaries, push them in fact, in order to bring back something dear that we had lost. For some of us, it was a connection that had never been possible, due to the logistical and financial challenges and constraints of in-person conferences. Specifically, we wanted to create spaces for junior scholars, BIPOC scholars, trans and non-binary people, single parents, people restricted by Covid, and people in countries without the right to enter the U.S. or the currency that would make that possible.

We believed in the beautiful possibilities that this conference could bring to life. We also knew, in a rather abstract way at the beginning, that we needed money to support such an endeavour. Five members of the organizing committee: Jennifer Fluri, Kate Coddington, Caroline Faria, and Sofia Zaragocin and myself set out to raise funds for the conference. We quickly encountered the usual obstacles feminist efforts face in the academy: gatekeepers, misleading information, delays in communication, opaque explanations for rejections, and an otherwise hostile working environment in several cases. Nevertheless, we persisted. And in so doing, we were able to secure the funds we needed to support the conference. I wish I could say that connecting across space, specifically to those who are marginal to mainstream academia, would be something that we could do affordably or with minimal funds. We are, after all, accustomed to doing much of this work on shoestring budgets. But the support from major donors, along with individual feminist scholars was crucial.

Even then, a conference of this scope, scale, and ambition however, and never before attempted by this particular group, each working across different global time zones, cost

more than we could have ever imagined. This was the case in terms of real dollars spent for access to the technology and the personnel to manage and maintain it over the three-day conference. But it was also true of the enormous amount of volunteer hours committed by the planning committee. It was worth it in every way, but there is a bitter sweetness to the knowledge that connecting across space in the ways that we wanted to, with high levels of accessibility, affordability, and openness, is incredibly expensive. In this sense, there is still much work to do to break down those barriers to entry and to create new kinds of affordable, accessible spaces for connection.

The following paper discusses and reflects upon the practices of organizing and attending the hybrid and 'multi-hub' 4th International Feminist Geography Conference (FEMGEOG 2022), framed by short reflective pieces by members of the organizing committee. The conference was conceptualized to meet the commitments to diversity, inclusivity, justice, and equity which are foundational to feminist geography's wide ranging research agendas as well as our pedagogies, working practices and relationships with each other. The paper reflects on the intellectual community building opportunities provided by the conference along with its challenges and limitations. Moreover, organising and participating in an international conference during the Covid-19 global pandemic highlighted our need for connection with others and for critical, feminist scholarship as well as the inequities and barriers which foreclosed engagement for all. The first reflection above, details this tension by describing both the possibilities offered by FEMGEOG 2022 for facilitating connection and new knowledge production but also the financial and emotional costs of organising a hybrid and inclusive event reliant on voluntary labour. Throughout the paper, the reflective pieces are presented in order to centre individual and collective experiences of planning and participating in the conference as presenters and session coordinators. This is done to demonstrate the breadth of activities involved in planning a conference of this kind as well as our differential relationships and feelings about it. Our intention is not to provide a cohesive account of the conference. Instead, the tensions and pitfalls involved are as insightful as what we gained. Indeed, we position this paper as less an endpoint and more an entry point for future FEMGEOGs and related events.

The joy of FEMGEOG 2022 planning and participation

Zoë Meletis, *University of Northern British Columbia, Canada.*

Barriers barriers barriers... They often dominate discussions when people try to do something differently when planning an academic activity or conference. I have experienced many versions of this resistance over the last few years—it can be very draining. And yet, I have also experienced a few amazing experiences when someone (usually a team of folks) decides to **ignore the barriers barriers barriers chorus**, and to persist with innovative formats, activities, and sessions. FEMGEOG 2022 was a resounding success in this regard. I experienced **pure joy** when contributing as an organizer and as a participant. **Yes! JOY! Really!** I realize that joy is not a word normally associated with remote organizational meetings or participation in an academic conference, but **JOY is what it brought me and no doubt others**. And this, despite the very heavy topics addressed at the conference such as: the new devastating post-Roe vs. Wade reproductive rights landscape in the US; the current eco-apocalypse of more-immediate-than-many-thought climate crisis impacts; ongoing gender and sexuality-linked discrimination and violence; and a plethora

of other patriarchal and misogynistic happenings currently plaguing the world. I learned a great deal at this conference, from scholars at all career levels, presenting from diverse places. I took copious notes about sessions, talks, workshops, and references shared. These will benefit my research, teaching, activism, and life. It was one of the most academically enriching experiences that I have had in years. But, all of that is not what I will remember most about FEMGEOG 2022. I will remember:

- 1) The successful ways in which the conference connected hundreds of us across international time zones and divergent work schedules;
- 2) The innovative, interactive, and exchange elements included in this conference; and
- 3) The community that so many of us found or grew via the gathering—one that was particularly needed during these difficult COVID-19 era times.

If I had to sum up the **FEMGEOG 2022**, as I experienced it from first organizational discussions to the throes of organizing, to the privileges of chairing, attending, and presenting, I would emphasize **JOY**. I would also add **INSPIRATIONAL** and **HOPEFUL** in terms of all that was achieved despite the many barriers and disincentives. I would end with the words **ANTIDOTE** and **ELIXIR**. The planning, meetings, final events and lingering memories remain a much-needed antidote to everyday anti-feminist experiences in academia and the larger world. **ELIXIR** because rather than just being neutralizing like an antidote, the whole process was curative and rejuvenating. It offered solidarity, understanding and camaraderie, even when addressing difficult topics. I know that I will be reflecting on and referring to this conference for years or decades to come. I cherish the process, the exchanges, and the creative community. On dark days, I like to access remnants of FEMGEOG 2022 nestled in my memory to remind me about the power and comfort of collaborative international feminist geography.

The paper speaks to a number of issues emerging though feminist work in ‘critical conference studies’ (Henderson and Burford 2020) and feminist geography (do Mar Pereira 2022; Oliver and Morris 2020) which cumulatively question that “by taking conferences as a central object of inquiry, what new things might gender and feminist researchers be able to discover about their own practices of learning, knowledge production and community?” (Henderson and Burford 2020 p.6). Indeed, Zoë Meletis’ account above reflects on the personal and political value of such practices through detailing how community building took place during the planning of and attendance at the conference. The overall conference theme of ‘Pushing Boundaries’, coined by Amy Trauger, acknowledges the ways that the presence and permeability of physical, geopolitical, theoretical, imagined, emotional, biological and disciplinary boundaries, inform and are informed by our research and feminist praxis (see Blidon & Zaragocin 2019). For example, organising a conference during the Covid-19 global pandemic meant we had to navigate different ‘physical’ boundaries when deciding where and how to locate the conference (see Ahn et al 2021) as well as adhering to local Covid-19 protocols in order to provide safe conference environments. FEMGEOG 2022 was ‘hosted in-person at several sites including the University of Colorado Boulder (See Figure 1), Kandbari, India; and Durham, England alongside an online conference platform, hosted via Pheedloop (Pheedloop 2025), to facilitate attendance and participation in light of travel and health related restrictions and concerns.



Figure 1. FEMGEOG 2022 Conference Participants University of Colorado, Boulder. June 17, 2022. Photograph credit: Jennifer Fluri.

The very nature of a 'multi-hub' conference format (Parncutt et al 2021) also allows for different kinds of interactions and session formats across virtual and in-person spaces whilst encouraging participation from those attendees who do not have the means to attend in-person. For example, the conference hosted roundtable discussions, professional development workshops, mentoring and networking opportunities, self-organized events, and a keynote panel of early career scholars. These were held in-person, online and in hybrid formats which meant that we could accommodate attendance in different time zones. Moreover, the paper sessions were 'flipped' so that recorded videos of papers were submitted in advance of the conference for attendees to watch and also access for a month after the conference (see Molana et al., 2023 for a discussion of FEMGEOG 2022's virtual conference environment). 'A 'multi-hub' format, therefore, multiplies the possibilities for 'where' a feminist geography conference can 'take place', beyond the primacy of having and claiming a physical location, as argued by do Mar Pereira (2022) to help assist in claiming 'epistemic status' for feminist geography itself. Indeed, our 're-imagining' (Oliver and Morriss 2020) of a conference space would seem to 'push against' entrenched exclusions experienced by some feminist geographers at conferences based on their embodied and intersectional differences, research specialisms and career stage. Of course, to organise a conference of this nature also demands considerable amounts of voluntary labour, financial support and technological expertise. Thus, this paper presents an honest and reflexive account of planning, participation and future for FEMGEOGS considering what we have learnt and what we would do differently.

The remainder of the paper is separated into sections entitled 'Planning FEMGEOG 2022', 'Inclusion and Connection', 'Facilitating Participation', '(Counter) Times and (Counter) Spaces', 'Learning from FEMGEOG 2022' and 'Conclusions/Futures' within which we present further reflections made by the organizing committee. Brenda Boonabaana critically reflects on the inclusivity of the 'new normal' of an online conference session created and attended by organisers and participants from different country contexts, thus enabling South-South collaboration enhanced by ad hoc translation in the session itself. Nancy Worth reflects on how the conference allowed her to expand upon her Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) funded symposium on the future of work, by contributing financially to the conference and organizing ten sessions on labor and the future of work. Kate Coddington and Jill Williams, discuss participant evaluations of the conference's flipped format, where presenters pre-recorded their presentations, which were viewable on the conference website platform ahead of, during, and after the live conference. Anindita

Datta describes the experience of the conference as a 'feminist counterspace' (Datta 2021) via the co-organisation of an in-person workshop at the Sambhaavana Institute, India, which was organized as part of the hub and spoke model of the FEMGEOG 2022. Here feminist scholars gathered, talked and built friendships and solidarity whilst also participating in the virtual sessions of the conference together. The presence of the workshop at FEMGEOG 2022 also served to challenge feminist geography's marginalization within mainstream human geography in India and opened conference spaces of allyship and care for the self and others. Sarah Klosterkamp, discusses her experiences as an early career scholar on the planning committee and shares some insights on how the collective dealt with unpleasant feelings and moments of conflict. Finally, as a means to frame the Conclusions/Futures section, Rachel Colls reflects on her experiences of being involved in the organization of the conference during the pandemic. She describes the significance of 'attending' the conference together with colleagues at Durham University, UK in a collage making workshop undertaken while watching the opening plenaries together, and their time attending a conference dinner.

Planning FEMGEOG 2022

A FEMGEOG conference was first held at The University of Nebraska (US) in 2014, then at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (US) in 2017, as a pre-conference for the Association of Canadian Geographers Conference at the University of Montreal (Canada) in 2018. Discussions about organizing the 4th International Feminist Geography Conference (FEMGEOG 2022) took place in several feminist geography sessions held during the virtual 2021 American Association of Geographers' annual meeting and an open call for interest disseminated via the crit-geog-forum mailing list. This led to the formation of an organizing committee, in the Summer of 2021, which was led by Jennifer Fluri and Amy Trauger and grew to a 25-person planning committee consisting of feminist geographers located in a range of country settings (USA, UK, India, Uganda, Ecuador, Canada, Germany and Sweden) and of career stages. In hindsight, the planning of a hybrid-multi-sited conference of this size should have begun 15-18 months before the live conference due to the workload of researching and organizing both in person and virtual options for attendance. The planning committee was divided into several sub-committees: Fundraising and Budgeting; Technology; Structure and Themes; Keynote; and Session Organization. In general, the subcommittees functioned well, though there were some incidents of miscommunication between committees simply due to the number of people involved in the work being done and their locations across time zones and country settings. Therefore, for future FEMGEOGs, we suggest building in contingencies and protocols for how the subcommittees should communicate with each other. For example, appointing a chair and vice-chair for each subcommittee, and identifying a clear and consistent method of communication among subcommittee chairs/vice-chairs.

As the planning work developed, the written documentation for the conference was shared with the planning committee through Google Docs. This functioned to provide people with information about the ongoing activity of each of the sub-committees as well as the opportunity to feed into the work being done. Monthly planning meetings also occurred over Zoom, which increased to weekly meetings two months before the conference and nearly daily meetings in the two weeks leading up to the start of the conference. The meetings were helpful in building momentum behind the activities of the different committees and were pivotal for building new friendships and collaborations. Indeed, the familiarity we had

using video conferencing tools in our teaching and research during the pandemic meant that the national and international scope of the conference could be fully realized as we scheduled and attended online meetings within the ebbs and flows of our everyday working lives- often stretching past the working day and into our evenings.

Inclusion and Connection

During the early planning meetings, discussions focused on choosing location(s) for the conference, funding and format, which led to a decision for the 4th FEMGEOG to offer a hybrid modality, both in-person, in Boulder, Colorado (and potentially several additional locations), along with virtual participation. The committee agreed to do everything possible to ensure financial inclusivity by not charging a fee for participation. Thus, the lack of conference fees was one small way to push against the paywall boundaries that keep academic knowledge from being easily accessible outside of University libraries. The organizing committee sought to push boundaries that have and continue to marginalize people or produce spaces of exclusion in recognition of Blidon and Zaragocin's (2019 p.916) call 'to exercise greater vigilance and solidarity with isolated colleagues who are struggling to make their voices heard, to be recognized'. Thus, the conference embraced a feminist politics that pushes, critiques, and traverses such boundaries, leading to greater insights driven by the imperative for social justice and inclusion at all scales (see Wright 2010). We sought horizontal forms of connection and inclusion among committee members, incorporating a variety of thoughts, ideas, and methods for advertising and organizing the conference. Below, Brenda Boonabaana critically reflects on their own experience of being involved in cross country collaboration in planning and participating in the conference. This reflection highlights the ways that connections were facilitated and maintained through virtual communication, Pheedloop, and the recording of conference sessions, but that time zone and language differences risk impeding opportunities for participation alongside the 'trade offs' associated with being unable to meet and network with feminist geographers in person.

A personal experience with co-organizing the 2022 Feminist Geography Conference

Brenda Boonabaana, University of Texas at Austin, US

Joining the Planning Committee for the Feminist Geography Conference, 2022 enabled me to experience a lot of incredible opportunities. I was able to join several subcommittees (technology, keynote and scheduling) and I co-organized and presented various sessions which exposed me to different scholars and ideas.

One of the key highlights was co-organising a South-South, Africa and Latin America feminist geography virtual side event, together with Sofia Zaragocin (Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Ecuador). The session attracted scholars from Uganda, Colombia, Brazil and Ecuador to engage and forge future scholarship dialogues, while 'pushing boundaries' as the conference theme stipulated. Although the different time zones were relatively challenging, they didn't stop us from coordinating this wonderful dialogue. Google Drive and Zoom meetings became handy for us, to coordinate and deliver the virtual session. The event created awareness and appreciation for cross regional South-South scholar engagements around feminist geography theory and practice grounded in the particularities of our locales. While the Latin American panellists were familiar with Spanish, the African panellists were more aligned to English, so the challenges of language

differences certainly played out. We had no budget for real-time translators or stenographers. But this was solved by one of the co-organizers (Sophia Zaragocin) who, in the moment, took on the translation role during the session. I realized that language barrier is real, and always needs to be considered, to enable fruitful scholarly interactions and partnerships.

Another piece for reflection ties to the opportunity to be part of early scholar committee that co-organized the conference plenary panel. This was co-managed with Tiana Bruno, University of Texas at Austin; Hanieh Molana, California State University and Victoria Ogoegbunam Okoye, SOAS University of London. It involved a lengthy and iterative engagement process between the organizers and keynote speakers. Again, being in different time zones proved challenging but the use of multiple virtual communication tools, including zoom meetings and email to successfully co-organize the session worked in our favour. This highlights how we leveraged the power of technology and personal determination to mitigate physical distance, which enabled representation across three continents - Africa, North America, and Europe - to engage and contribute.

The third reflection point relates to the third co-organized session titled: 'Thinking, Being and Living Intersectional Feminist Geographies' under the BIPOC/ Intersectionality theme. This was co-organized with, and delivered by Caroline Faria, Tianna Bruno, Madelaine Cahuas, Cristina Faiver-Serna, Kaily Heitz, Christy Hyman, Aaron Mallory Hanieh Molana and Nadia Mosquera Muriel. As a member of the session organizing team, I was inspired by the prior preparations and directions around constructive and thought-provoking discussions around race, patriarchy and intersectionality in different spatial contexts. While the planning meetings were not affected by time zones, much I was willing to share my thoughts (virtually), during the actual session at the conference, the timing could not work given that the session was at 3.00 am at my local location. As a result, I had to miss a key component of the session I co-organised.

Finally, in terms of participation in conference sessions, I found Pheedloop extremely helpful, professional, and user friendly. One of the strengths was the opportunity to avail all conference resources on the platform for a long time frame for us to watch any missed sessions, or to revisit the attended sessions for deeper reflections and personal engagements with content. While operating virtually meant that I never had an opportunity to physically meet others in Colorado, Boulder, I came to appreciate that the 'new normal' requires trade-offs.

The conferences sessions were organized around the following themes (see Table 1) derived both in response to the content and focus of papers and session proposals as well as being developed in advance as a means to represent the breadth and depth of contemporary feminist geographies across country and institutional settings.

Table 1. FEMGEOG 2022 session themes

<p>Activism</p>	<p>The participants in these sessions discussed various methods and forms of activism within and outside the academy, pushing the structural and situational boundaries of marginalization and disempowerment.</p>
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Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)	Some of these sessions provided BIPOC participants with a space for building connections and networking, with additional sessions focused on geographic analyses and critical examinations of race, ethnicity, and Indigeneity.
Climate Change, Political Ecology and Dispossession	Taking a feminist, racial, and environmental justice approach, the presentations in these sessions examined places experience climate related challenges and associated dispossession.
Geopolitics/Political Geography	These sessions focused on feminist contributions to critical geopolitics and political geography.
GIS/Visualization	Feminist and qualitative GIS/Visualization have pushed the quantitative boundaries of GIS and incorporated intersectional gender as category of analysis.
Global South	These sessions pushed against the boundaries of global north and English language dominance in the academy.
Intersectionality	Sessions focusing on intersectionality challenged reductionists and narrow portrayals of gender by incorporating intersectional identities and associated power relations.
Labor/Future of Work	This series of sessions examined gender and labor prior to and during the Covid-19 pandemic along with conceptualizing work in a post-pandemic world.
Masculinity	These sessions pushed against conventional boundaries of masculinity by providing complex understandings and analyses of masculinity across various spatial contexts.
Migration	The sessions focusing on migration engaged with the challenges of physical borders and the challenges experienced by individuals and groups fleeing conflict, environmental disaster.
Pandemic	The boundaries and challenges of the pandemic were examined in these sessions, focusing on intersectional gender related challenges.
Queer Geography/Sex and Sexuality	These sessions pushed against the gender binary and heterosexism.
Reproductive Rights	These sessions focused on the reproductive rights in a time of erasure of reproductive freedoms and the boundaries posed on women's bodies and reproductive expectations.

Research Methods	These sessions engaged with the multiple methods used by feminist geographers to collect and analyze data.
Urban Geography and Infrastructure	The structures and boundaries imposed through infrastructures and urban spaces were engaged with and pushed through various research and analytical approaches.

The conference itself demonstrates the diversity of feminist geography/ies as well as its influence and presence across a range of sub-disciplinary areas of research. This is similar to Blidon and Zaragocin's (2019) approach to developing their special issue on international feminist geographies. For them it was not productive to draw lines around 'gender' and 'feminism' and to determine in advance what feminist geography is or is not. As with their special issue, FEMGEOG 2022 provided an inclusive space to diversify and decolonise "subject-matter, methods, epistemological foundations, and theoretical points of reference" (Blidon and Zaragocin 2019: 920-1; see also Zaragocin and Caretta 2020); acknowledge competing orthodoxies of what constitutes 'good' academic research; and to pay attention to where feminist geography is placed, policed or excluded within broader disciplinary and country specific settings.

Facilitating Participation

As mentioned above, the conference format, whilst bound to some structures such as session length, format, and organizational structures, also pushed against and extended the geographical boundaries of time and space by offering multiple options and modalities for participation. This required developing a structure that provided participation across multiple time-zones and embedded opportunities for individuals to engage with conference presentations and presenters both during and for several months after the time-period of the live conference. The flexibility of our approach meant that the conference provided an unexpected opportunity for one planning committee member, Nancy Worth, (see below) to bring a planned symposium on 'the future of work' into the hybrid space offered by FEMGEOG 2022. This in turn provided the possibility for international attendees' and early career colleagues' participation.

Turning a symposium into a conference theme

Nancy Worth, University of Waterloo, Canada

In Spring 2020, Emily Reid-Musson, Daniel Cockayne, Lia Frederiksen and I received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) for a symposium on the Future of Work. We postponed our planned event in Fall 2020 because of the pandemic, with no real sense of when we would be able to reschedule. When I was invited to join the FEMGEOG 2022's organizing collective, I realized the conference and its hybrid format would be a great opportunity to bring the planned symposium into the conference as a series of sessions on labor. Our Canadian group had previously organized a series of sessions at the 2018 Feminist Geography conference in Montreal, and it was great to continue this work in a more expansive form. While the majority of financial support came from the conference's NSF grant, we were able to offer some funding from the SSHRC grant to help ensure the conference would be free for virtual participants. The hybrid format

and free registration encouraged significant interest in the labor theme, with 10 Labor/Future of Work paper and panel sessions in the conference. (Many thanks to Tyler Blackman and Caroline Faria for scheduling across time zones). This was more inclusive and expansive than the initial plan for a symposium and nesting these sessions as a thematic track within the larger conference also meant that presenters and attendees were able to learn from and share research with feminist geographers beyond sub-disciplinary spaces of economic and labor geography. The flipped paper format was also key to the conference's success; watching short formal papers in advance of synchronous virtual sessions on Zoom emphasized discussion and engagement, while also allowing participants to meet and get to know each other.

Beyond the structural possibilities of a free hybrid conference, my aim in being part of the organizing collective was to generate opportunities for early career scholars. First, building on the keynote model of the wider conference, the labor team organized a panel on the future of work, highlighting the research of early career scholars. The labor theme also featured two workshops and two further panels led by early career participants, and we invited early career scholars to chair paper sessions. Grant funding allowed us to compensate invited speakers and workshop organizers with honoraria. Second, through the conference we facilitated a paper competition on feminist economic geography—papers from early career scholars were adjudicated by a panel of their peers, and the grant allowed us to provide prize money for the competition and honoraria for the adjudicators. Overall, what we were able to build within the FEMGEOG 2022 conference was quite different from what we initially planned for the funded symposium, but we achieved our aim of examining and questioning the future of work. To me, this experience has really been a lesson about how to creatively use grant funding: leveraging the impact of a small grant by working with a larger group, while also distributing grant funds to 18 scholars for their meaningful contributions. A free hybrid conference is a huge achievement, coordinated by a committed group of scholars each doing their part and contributing the time, money, and resources they have available.

The planning committee chose to use Pheedloop (Pheedloop 2025) to host the online content because it offered organizational flexibility and at an affordable price point. Additionally, Pheedloop offered translation services. However, the additional costs and labor required to effectively use this feature fell well outside our budget. Therefore, while the organizing committee intended to push against the boundaries of English language hegemony (Müller 2021) present in many international academic conferences, this sadly remained beyond our financial abilities to provide effective quality translations in multiple languages during the conference. However, we did encourage participants to present in their preferred language, which several did throughout the conference and in one case, as mentioned by Brenda Boonabaana above, ad hoc translation in sessions was possible. Another method for pushing against the boundaries of time-space which exist in live, in-person conferences was to utilise a flipped conference model. This model, based on the flipped learning approach used widely in higher education teaching (see Graham et al. 2017) encouraged presenters to record their paper presentations ahead of their sessions so they could be viewed in advance of (or after) the sessions. The flipped paper model allowed for more focused discussions about the papers with audience members during the live sessions, which were also recorded and placed on the conference platform. However, this format also

places workload pressures on presenters and audiences alike to produce and watch presentations in advance of the session. Moreover, varied audience engagement with pre-recorded presentations can make facilitating sessions difficult. Kate Coddington and Jill Williams reflect on their own experiences of using a flipped format below:

The opportunities and challenges of flipped formats

Kate Coddington, University of Albany, US and Jill Williams, University of Arizona, US

Hybrid and virtual modalities can effectively increase access to conference participation; however, fostering meaningful engagement virtually presents challenges. In spring 2021, Jill and Kate helped organize a conference on border enforcement that used a 'flipped' presentation model, where presenters recorded their talks in advance and live sessions over Zoom were used for discussion and questions. This format required 'pre-work' for everyone involved, but participants enjoyed the direct engagement that resulted. Based on Jill and Kate's experience with this model, many session organizers at the international feminist geography conference adopted a flipped presentation model as well. We analyzed the results of the post-conference survey to determine how this model fared in the larger conference setting.

We found that 64% of those who completed the post-survey (n=84) indicated that they liked the flipped format model, whereas 17% did not. Some participants commented that the flipped format gave them more time to think about the work and allowed for more robust conversations during the session time. As one participant explained:

"This was my first time presenting in a "flipped format" paper session, and it was a delight to sit with other participants' work before, then gather for a full period of discussion. Especially with the flexibility offered by virtual conferencing, I'd strongly recommend flipped format paper sessions to other conferences. The discussion period has always felt much too short, in 'traditional' sessions, and often, not every presenter has opportunity to dialogue about their work. In this flipped format mode, everyone had multiple opportunities, and I felt like so much more community was formed (and connections and inspirations made) at this conference. Also really appreciate having the presentations available post-conference, as often the discussions made me want to revisit scholars' work."

Another commented:

"It's really nice to show up to a conference with the work of presenting behind me and to just enjoy (without stress) the ability to connect."

An additional benefit of the flipped format was that presentations were available outside of the dedicated session time, increasing access across time zone differences, conflicting sessions, or other constraints. Survey respondents noted that flipped sessions were particularly useful amongst those for whom English is not their first language.

However, others noted that the format required additional time for both presenters and participants outside of the allocated conference period. If participants did not watch sessions beforehand, it was difficult to foster conversation. One participant explained:

"I observed that in general, people didn't watch or take the time to do the 'homework' in advance of the sessions. Therefore, it was somewhat difficult to get the main points or content of the recorded papers."

Here are our key takeaways about the flipped format:

1. The flipped format can be an effective way of freeing up synchronous time for conversation among presenters and attendees.
2. The extra time demands associated with the flipped format need to be clearly communicated with presenters and participants and the number of flipped format sessions should be limited in order to reduce unnecessary time burdens.
3. Strong facilitation is key to making the format effective. Session facilitators need to clearly communicate to presenters and manage time strictly in order to ensure adequate time for discussion.
4. We encourage conference organizers to provide both flipped format and traditional format sessions in order to accommodate the preferences of presenters and varied time constraints.

Over the last few years, we have been pushed in important ways to consider how we leverage technology to increase access and foster engagement. The flipped format model provides one way of fostering engagement in the Zoom-iverse and beyond, but should be implemented with consideration of the challenges outlined above so as to avoid creating new barriers.

(Counter) Times and (Counter) Spaces

The "live" conference occurred between June 15-17, 2022, while access to pre-recorded presentations as part of the 'flipped paper format' was made available prior to the start of the live conference, as mentioned above. During the conference, all sessions (with the permission of presenters) were recorded and included on the virtual conference platform (Pheedloop) and the conference website and remained available for six months after the conference. Again, the intention was to extend the conference's presence and content beyond the times and spaces of its manifestation as a live, in-person event. The planning committee scheduled sessions based on the location of presenters during the live conference, to provide time-zone friendly sessions. Therefore, conference sessions were scheduled beginning on June 15, 2022, at 10:00 am - 5:00 pm (Mountain Daylight Time/MDT), and June 16, 2022, from 7:00 am - 12:00 midnight (MDT), and 12:00 midnight - 3:00 pm (MDT) on Friday, June 17, 2022. Time zone friendly scheduling provided opportunities to participate within the working hours of several different locations globally. Recorded presentations and sessions available through Pheedloop, allowed individuals to access content outside of the scheduled sessions (see Molana et al. 2024).

As mentioned above, a multi-hub conference can also involve a number of in-person events held in different spaces. During FEMGEOG 2022, this meant the in-person events were held at The University of Colorado, US, Durham University, UK and the Sambhaavana Institute, Kandbari India. This provided the space for location-specific activities as well opportunities to engage with the conference online; together or individually.

Below, Anindita Datta reflects on their experiences of one of the in-person conference 'hubs', a workshop held in India, which they frame as a 'counterspace' (Datta 2021). The workshop sought to create a peer network for emerging Indian feminist geography scholars orientated around care, creativity and compassion whilst also providing the opportunity to attend and present at the conference online.

A feminist counterspace of care, collaboration and celebration

Anindita Datta, University of Dehli, India

A feminist counterspace is "non-hegemonic, operating against the grain of hegemonic spaces, and multilayered, existing both in physical and experiential terms... they are counterspaces, or differential spaces, as they operate outside the control of the established order" (Datta 2021, p 151). Reading against this, I felt that the feminist geography conference and its India workshop created a powerful feminist counterspace by subverting, somewhat, the patriarchal, institutional and structured conference spaces of the neoliberal university through effective use of the hybrid conference, flipped and hub- spoke format. Within this large and fluid feminist counterspace nestled smaller spaces of solidarity and dissidence, cradling each other like Matrushka dolls, to successfully push boundaries of location, distance and time. Within the organizing committee, we came together from multiple locations to plan thematic sessions across time zones even as our bodies and cityscapes were re-emerging from the grip of Covid -19. We held space for each other, leaning in when needed. The healing and hope this exercise provided was simply cathartic as we stitched together a uniquely inclusive and care-centred feminist collaboration.

For the India event, trust and a feminist friendship between Anu Sabhlok and me as co-organizers circumvented red tape to give birth to the idea of siting the event at the Sambhaavnaa Institute, fashioning it as a feminist writing and mentoring workshop - outside the formal institutional spaces of the University (See Figure 2 and 3). Our idea was to create a peer network for emerging scholars that built on notions of care, creativity and compassion. We planned the mentoring workshop around techniques to enhance their writing skills and find their voice in a nurturing environment. Nestled in the boundaryless space of possibilities 'Sambhaavnaa'¹ the venue provided a utopian model for a sustainable, egalitarian society -a counterspace against the capitalistic, patriarchal and caste-ridden order. Cradled within our workshop, a young feminist network started to take root as stories, tears and emotions that had no space for expression in formal settings began to well up. We embraced discussions on methodological dilemmas and geopolitics of citations as Anu and I employed fluid methods, encouraging our participants to define their own horizons, sing, emote and write through their bodies.

While our small workshop proceeded at Sambhaavnaa, its presence was magnified over cyberspace through our event updates and hashtags on social media.

¹ Sambhaavnaa in Hindi means possibility. Sambhaavnaa Institute's initiatives are driven by the objective of transforming society built on the principles of Social Harmony, Economic Justice, Political Justice and Environmental Balance (Available from: <https://www.sambhaavnaa.org/> Date Accessed: 22nd September 2023)



Figure 2. Participants in Kandbari, Himachal Pradesh, India. Photograph credit: Maria Anne Fitzgerald.



Figure 3. Participants in Kandbari, Himachal Pradesh, India. Photograph credit: Kanupriya.

These circulations upended the invisibility and marginalization that this event had encountered locally within my Department. Anu and my welcome and introduction recorded extempore, came together beautifully with us completing each other's sentences - and was among the most viewed! Thus, the small 'site' of our India event and the overall marginality of feminist geography in India^[3] was temporarily subverted as our event -got magnified through views, retweets and hashtags. I couldn't help reflecting that organizing this workshop on campus would never have yielded the kind of synergies and outcomes that taking it off campus eventually did.

The time differences allowed us to create slots to tune into the virtual conference sessions and host our own sessions over Pheedloop. In my case, this was a session offered jointly with Maria Anne Fitzgerald, where, as mentor and mentee, we reflected upon self-care and allyship in academia, arguing that care-related activities are personal and become political

when woven into facilitating practices of 'caring for' and 'caring - with(in)' academia (Askins & Blazek 2016). Our session too became a smaller counterspace within the India workshop, resonating the courage, care and celebration of the larger counterspace of the virtual and in person events of this feminist collaboration, underlining my contention that "Doing feminist research is a political project" (Datta 2020, p 13).

Learning from FEMGEOG 2022

Due to the extensive and enduring commitment of the planning committee, the conference was an enormous success. There were 500 registrants from around the world, including regions typically underrepresented in Geography conferences. And we had over 300 people participating during the live conference. This further validated the worth and value of academic conferences in sharing ideas and networking across and in spite of the limitations of time, space, and economics. However, the realities of organising and participating in FEMGEOG 2022 was not without tensions and difficulties. Below, Sarah Klosterkamp critically reflects on some of these in relation to working across time zones, the financial constraints and burdens of making the conference inclusive and questioning the extent of inclusivity and collegiality, sometimes amongst feminist geographers themselves.

Pushing Boundaries from Within and Beyond Feminist Geographies

The Invitation: A Moment of Fear and Possibility

Sarah Klosterkamp, University of Bonn, Germany

There is so much light in the room we are holding for each other, even though it's via Zoom. "Sorry for dropping the bomb on you"—that was one of the first lines in a personal email sent to me five weeks before, in August 2021, when I was asked by Caroline Faria if I would be interested in organizing this multi-hub, international conference on Feminist Geographies. At first, I was a little bit frightened by the idea of organizing such a massive event. But this first meeting turned out to be such a wonderful experience, unfolding into even more meaningful interactions over time. Even though the tasks kept multiplying in frequency and urgency, they remained an important core of how we (stayed) organized and dealt with all challenges, when some problems became "bumpier" than anticipated.

Herein, Feminist Geography, for me, has once again revealed itself as a deeply embodied and inspiring practice, where powerful individuals, whether closely or loosely aligned, come together to care for each other and create infrastructures of support. This conference was more than an academic event; it was a space where we built and carried an infrastructure of collective work and solidarity, holding onto a shared vision. We challenged traditional academic structures while also navigating our differences as a group of like-minded yet distinctly unique personalities.

I am not known for staying up late, especially not for work-related matters—a challenge when coordinating across time zones. I am simply not a night owl, but rather a lark. Yet, within this collective, everything unfolded from a place of joy rather than pressure. From (co-)creating a website logo with Amy Trauger and Irene Johannsen to developing conference tweets and tech spaces with Hanieh Molana and Nancy Hiemstra, or organizing European-based scholarly sessions with Deidre Conlon and Rachel Colls, each task felt supported. Even our email exchanges and world-spanning Zoom meetings, led by our fearless coordinators

Jennifer Fluri and Amy Trauger, were also enriching, thoughtful and full of support for the individual burden and constraints, we all were facing. The friendships and trust that emerged from this collective labor made tasks lighter.

This experience stood in stark contrast to many academic settings where marginalized and underrepresented scholars in more junior positions often find themselves burdened with invisible, undervalued work. In this space, we looked out for one another, distributing the workload in ways that recognized and respected each other's capacities. Because of this collective ethic, staying up late wasn't even necessary—we had each other's backs.

The Burden of Structural Constraints

Of course, as time went on, not everything remained so seamless. The burden of carrying this event became heavier at times, particularly when we faced structural limitations beyond our control, such as funding constraints or bureaucratic delays. Despite our best efforts to amplify marginalized voices, the systems we were pushing against—underfunded, bureaucratic, patriarchal, and exclusionary—remained formidable. It was sobering to recognize that even with our collective commitment, some structural shortcomings persisted.

One of the most challenging aspects was navigating financial constraints without compromising our core values, such as maintaining no-fee participation. The weight of these decisions was shouldered unevenly, with some members of the organizing team stepping in with private money to fill gaps where institutional funding fell short. This labor was not only logistical but also emotional—we carried the weight of wanting to create an inclusive space while feeling the constraints of limited resources.

At times, this emotional burden was intensified by the actions of those we had invited into this space. It was disappointing to see that some scholars who had benefitted from prominent, well-compensated positions within the conference were unwilling to be flexible when it came to scheduling and funding constraints. At the same time, they were the only individuals who got compensated for their contributions at all (aside of the tech companies), but were not willing to distribute a portion toward our direction, when we needed their mutual support most. For me, this was one of the hardest moments to deal with and hold spaces for those at the forefront, because it made visible the uneven distribution of power and solidarity within academic feminism itself.

Reckoning with Tensions in Feminist Spaces

Rather than calling out individuals, I want to reflect on how these moments reveal deeper tensions within (feminist) academic spaces. The labor of making these spaces accessible by uplifting marginalized voices, people and their visions, is often carried disproportionately by those with fewer institutional privileges. Early-career scholars, including those on the organizing team, often found themselves in a paradoxical position—both striving to create opportunities for others (in similar positions) and bearing the weight of institutional constraints themselves. The expectation that feminist spaces should somehow be free from these tensions is itself a burden. A more honest reckoning with the structures that shape these dynamics is needed.

Despite these challenges, the experience of collective mourning and standing together across time zones and digital spaces reaffirmed the spirit of engaged feminist scholarship.

When I think back to our initial meeting on September 29, 2021, I still feel the warmth of that shared space. The conference was a labor of care, a reminder that feminist academic spaces require constant tending—not just in resisting dominant structures but also in navigating the tensions that arise within our own communities. This was a space where we learned not just through formal discussions but through the very practice of organizing—through the conflicts, the joys, the exhaustion, and the solidarity.

Transforming Labor into Learning

The labor of making space for feminist scholarship is real, and it carries weight. But within that weight, there is also the possibility of transformation (Freaser et al. 2017). I hope for much more to come as we continue to push boundaries—both within and beyond the discipline.

It must be said that the time necessary to build the conference infrastructure was much more extensive than our initial estimates and incurred additional costs due to the need to hire an outside firm to provide additional technological assistance. This was particularly true in the final two months of preparation, where several committee members were spending between 30-50 hours per week on conference-related activities. For example, it became clear to the technology sub-committee that additional assistance beyond what Pheedloop could provide was necessary for building, maintaining, and managing the virtual platform both prior to and during the live conference. This required hiring another company—*Digital Motion*—to provide expertise and assistance. The *Digital Motion* team worked closely with the technology sub-committee to build the virtual platform on Pheedloop, upload pre-recorded videos, along with providing vital technological assistance during the conference both virtually, and in-person in Boulder, CO.

The time and attention that went into this conference involved working within structural boundaries while pushing against neoliberal capitalist structures of monetary time and labor. While we succeeded in providing a free conference and a platform that was accessible globally (to those with Internet access), the costs for a free conference were experienced through the extensive volunteer time and labor of the organizing committee. In order to effectively push against the structures of capitalist monetization (including no-fee participation) the planning committee collectively dedicated over 2,500 hours of valuable volunteer labor and sought and received funding from seven different funding agencies (U.S. National Science Foundation Grant #2211439, Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Research and Innovation Office at CU-Boulder, Gender and Feminist Geography Research Group of the Royal Geographical Society, Geography Department at CU-Boulder, Feminist Geography Specialty Group of the AAG, and the IGU Commission on Gender and Geography). Despite the funding received through grant writing, additional funds were needed to address unexpected costs, which was supplemented by personal research funds from organizing committee members and donations from feminist geographers worldwide.

Conclusions/Futures

Connecting, gathering and making (new) feminist conference spaces

Rachel Colls, Durham University, UK

I first heard about the opportunity to be involved in the organization of a proposed FEMGEOG 2022 conference in an email circulated on the Crit-Geog-Forum in the Summer of 2021. It was an open invitation for people to reach out if they were interested in discussing ideas for an international feminist geographies conference. For me, it came at a time where I was feeling isolated and, quite frankly, worn out after four months of lockdown restrictions in the UK where my working life had switched online and now involved a commute up the stairs to my office. My family life existed through the emotional haze of home-schooling, keeping everyone safe, well and fed, and trying to maintain relationships under such difficult circumstances. For me, this email felt like an opportunity to reach out, connect with other feminist geographers and to work collaboratively; to be part of something and be with others.

Those early planning meetings held on Zoom with people from different countries and in different time zones were exciting and energizing. I looked forward to them and enjoyed the openness of people when listening to each other's ideas. I sensed the conference itself coming to life. There were often new people to meet; those who joined the committee as word spread and as organizers reached out to early career scholars, NGOs, or colleagues in different countries. I liked the momentum that built through the formation of sub-committees and allocating and documenting work 'done' on Google Drive. There was also an, often unsaid, awareness that sometimes work did not get done or that people could not always attend meetings, might have to leave early or that technologies or time zones did not work. Meeting on Zoom, and the access this sometimes provided to our 'unpaid' working lives as we saw or heard morning school runs, home-schooling, mealtimes, pets, and more, was a constant reminder of the broader contexts of our lives. Thus, it was imperative that the workload be shared, and we acknowledged that people would be differentially able to engage with the organization of the conference at different points of the planning process.

My involvement in the conference also reflected my eagerness to develop more collaborations between UK based feminist geographies and others. My committee role in the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) Gender and Feminist Geographies Research Group (GFGRG) meant I was able to begin to foster such connections. Deidre Conlon the international liaison representative of GFGRG and also on the FEMGEOG organizing committee, Kate Maclean the Group Chair and I applied for Royal Geographical Society (RGS) funding to support conference activities and attendance. We accrued funding for two roving postgraduate reporters: Yolanda Weima (York University, Canada) and Aila Bandagi Kandlakunta (University of Nevada, US), who both attended the conference online and wrote blog posts for the conference website about the sessions. We also awarded bursaries for UK based postgraduates to support their attendance. Given the difficulties people had in traveling to Colorado, members of the GFGRG chaired some of the online conference sessions, sometimes at night or early in the morning UK time or presented their work in hybrid sessions.

Funding was also made available for UK based feminist geographers to hold events in person at the same time as the conference. This provided an opportunity to organize feminist geographies events but also to come together in person to 'attend' the conference. In Durham (UK), my institutional location, I co-organised a 'collage workshop', led by my colleague, Leah Edwards (See Figure 4). Collage involves the process of bringing

together and arranging different materials, for example, paper, notes, photographs, newspaper cuttings, string, feathers and wool, as means to explore and/or document a particular theme, moment, question or event. Leah uses collage as a method in her research on families, sustainability and climate change. The emphasis is not always on the end product and instead the value for some is in the process of making. This in-person event was one of the first we had held in our department after Covid restrictions were lifted, and thus, for me, was charged with much anticipation and joy. The fifteen participants of the workshop were provided with the materials to make their own collage as a means to explore an aspect of their research or ideas for future research to reflect on a specific issue or topic or to experiment with the method itself. My own collage (See Figure 5) allowed me to think about the intersections of my personal, embodied and academic lives. I found it helpful to document and explain some of the difficulties I had been experiencing when trying to focus my ideas for future research as lockdown ended. We also attended the opening conference plenary together online, had an in-person reading group, and went out for a conference dinner. These multiple modes of engagement, activities and settings challenged conventional notions of where a conference takes place. At times this is not easy to manage and indeed might not be possible or accessible to everyone in all situations. However, it has taught me a lot about thinking 'creatively' about what a conference can be and to remember how sometimes it is important to simply gather and be with each other.



Figure 4. Collage Workshop (Durham University, UK June 15th 2022) Photograph credit: Rachel Colls.



Figure 5. Rachel's collage (June 15th 2022). Photograph credit: Rachel Colls.

I miss organising the conference as much as I enjoyed the conference itself. It passed by in a blur of feminist bliss where I moved between topics, places and formats, chaired a hybrid session held in person in Boulder (US), and met with UK feminist geographers online whilst the majority of the conference slept. I miss the discussions and the regular contact with people and the friends I made. In particular, I give thanks and gratitude to Jennifer Fluri for her hard work, guidance and specifically her calmness in relation to all things technical. Even amidst the physical and emotional aftermath of the conference, which found many of us exhausted, as well as proud and inspired, I was still thinking about what I had learnt and how to take this forward to the next one! Indeed, I encourage all feminist geographers to be part of future FEMGEOGs. It has reminded me of the value of international collaboration and community and also how to step outside of the conventions of conference formats. Can't wait for the next one!

This conclusion begins with Rachel's reflections on their experiences of planning and participating in FEMGEOG 2022. It provides insight into global and personal context within which the conference took place as well as the opportunities it provided for feminist geography engagement and knowledge production in virtual and physical space. Indeed, the success of the 4th International Feminist Geography Conference is attributed to the organizers' commitment to providing open and accessible platforms for academic engagement, along with many volunteer hours. The idea of pushing the boundaries of neoliberal capitalism by offering free registration and participation in this conference did however come at a monetary cost, which were covered by grants and donations. In addition, the volunteer hours and time burdens for the planning committee were necessary to offset the labor costs of conference organizing. This raises some important questions about the gendering of unpaid service work in academia. For example, as academics we engage in many forms of labor that are not directly paid, but considered part of our overall service to our department, universities and the discipline of geography (i.e., peer reviews, non-academic publishing, mentoring, etc.). These items appear on our CVs, while they are considered "extra" or "value added" in most methods of evaluating productivity and progress in the academy. While certain forms of labor may not be compensated monetarily, are there

other ways in which feminist geographers can and should recognize, highlight, support, and incorporate this type of labor as integral rather than additional? Pushing boundaries includes challenging the status quo and the ways in which scholars are evaluated and promoted within their institutions.

Other methods for evaluating the volunteer labor necessary for this conference must consider the privilege to do so. The privilege of academic positions and the flexibility they afford us to spend time on conference organizing. Additionally, the incalculable but highly valuable connections and networks that were built from this conference, in addition to new friendships, collaborations, and connections. Additionally, it is vital for those of us in senior or leadership positions to push against the boundaries of how academic labor is recognized and valued. Therefore, we suggest the recognition of conference organizing (that attends to diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and no (or low) cost participation) to be viewed as part of or integral to our research, a form of teaching and mentorship through knowledge production, and service associated with the logistics of conference organizing. Additionally, we should continue to push against the academic boundaries that devalue service work, while simultaneously service work remains vital to challenging the status quo and pushing against the boundaries of the academic exclusion and the histories of Geography as a white, male, and colonial discipline.

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