Critical Orthodoxies and (Re) Imagining Scholarship for a Brave New World

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Special Issue Introduction

March of 2020 marked a new beginning of unprecedented proportions in global history as humanity was faced with the deadly scourge of a coronavirus disease which came to be known as COVID-19. While the world watched news feeds from a constellation of outlets, tracked the multiverse of cyberspace, and fielded the commentaries, there was generated uncertainty, fear, hysteria, and hopelessness. As the spring season of 2020 advanced, so too did the rise of very healthy paranoia for so many people facing what was now a global pandemic as COVID19 advanced with reckless abandon. Every sector of life was affected by the deadly disease and the everyday schedules of social life were affected by the paralysis caused by COVID19. This paralysis increased when the fear of the unknown virus led to a quarantine with everyone facing confinement to further health and safety protocols. While begrudgingly accepting the new normalcy brought about by the pandemic, new challenges emerged. The primal question of, “Now, how do we work, exist, and carry out our everyday lives given these unprecedented circumstances? This became the uncomfortable reality for reflection while the world waited impatiently for solutions to arrive to combat the crisis.

As creatures of habit, creatives and professionals from all walks of life were forced to pivot their daily career habits to the confines of home office spaces to achieve some semblance of productivity. For most, this shift meant severing ties with their brick-and-mortar work locations, retraining their work habits, and developing new ways of conceiving one’s creative self. Writers, artists, teachers, content developers, and researchers (to name a few) persisted through the quarantine to find new a normalcy. Even more significant, some creative minds simply stopped to appreciate the gift of what became a ‘pause period’ from the hamster wheel of continuous work.

From this complex milieu of an unprecedented time, the NOMMO Scholars Collective (NSC) was formed, and evolved to become a lifeline of support for Black and Brown diasporic scholars who produce new knowledge that contributes to numerous academic fields. The NSC is an academic guild of Black, Brown and POC scholars, activists, organizers, political theoreticians, teachers, and artists dedicated to producing work that centralizes the scholarly contributions of marginalized people throughout the globe. NSC members present new knowledge and interrupt anti-Black and Brown and racially problematic positions found in the areas of law, policy, curriculum, and oppressive social and classroom pedagogies. The word, ‘NOMMO,’ which translates from the Dogon of West Africa as: the creative power of the word or the spoken word, came to embody and nurture a ‘maroon’ space in the tradition of intellectuals such as Asa Hilliard, Toni Cade Bambara, CLR James and Esther Cooper Jackson. This collective of Black and Brown diasporic scholars found immediate solace and comradeship in our understandings of career demands brought about by the academy. Since higher education requires faculty to juggle teaching,
service, and scholarship expectations, career academics at resource-rich institutions utilize support systems, plentiful research funds, teaching and research assistants, and other opportunities that give them a structural advantage in the ‘publish or perish’ culture of academia. Conversely, these systems are not able to offer suitable mechanisms of encouragement for Black and Brown scholars working at predominantly white institutions of higher education. These spaces are historically devoid of the necessary communities that are essential to ensure support for academics engaged in the production of anti-oppressive work.

Hence, the Journal of Intersectionality (JOI) presents this special issue in conjunction with the NOMMO Scholars Collective (NSC) for the Fall of 2022 for the express purpose of showcasing the scholarship of such Black and Brown academics who were able to find productivity during the COVID19 pandemic. This special issue covers four central themes that represent the NSC as writers, researchers, classroom teachers, scholar-activists, community leaders, political organizers, thinkers, and curators of new processes aligned with the new normalcies created by the global pandemic of the COVID19 virus.

The four themes of this special issue include: 1) Writing, which explores the diverse constellation of processes that several of the NSC members have utilized, shared, and analyzed during the NSC writing retreats held both during in-person program sessions and also virtually due to COVID19 restrictions on travel and collective gatherings. NSC contributors engage in a myriad of writing styles and approaches spanning traditional academic writing, creative writing, critical media, etc.; 2) Research Methods highlight contributions of NSC scholars that represent varied methodologies involving archival data analysis, interpretive investigation, qualitative methods, auto-ethnographies, and mixed methodologies implemented to answer our greater research questions. NSC contributors offer insights on their research methods for their respective work and forthcoming scholarship; 3) Curriculum and Instruction Scholarship outlines the ways in which NSC is largely influenced by the scholarship-teaching nexus that results from our various research investigations. NSC members thrive on scholarly production not merely for scholarship’s sake. Rather, NSC members produce scholarship to engage in ‘praxis’ and solution-based outcomes which often emerge through classroom instruction and student engagement around critical societal issues. This theme is dedicated to the innovative course developments which have been created by NSC members in the mediums of syllabi, student capstone projects, online course platforms, teaching innovations, course restructurings and school-community-alternative scholarship outcomes such as blogs, op-eds and white papers; 4) COVID19 Scholarship and New Normalcy Scholarship provides NSC an expressive thematic space to (re)imagine current scholarly orthodoxies which have been challenged, interrupted and, in many cases, halted due to our inabilities to efficiently transition into quarantine scholars. This section offers invaluable insights for both current and future scholars, community activists and political organizers to envision their work, forthcoming research and processes as evolving endeavors. COVID19 has forced higher education and the political landscape to grapple with a new normalcy. NSC offers perspectives on these paradigm shifts for critical scholars of history, race, gender, economic (in)stability, geo-politics, education, curriculum, women’s studies, Black studies, Marxist studies and transnational studies to name a few.

In reflecting on the aims of the NOMMO collective, this special issue fosters scholarly creativity by providing the space for academics to engage in the magical practice of using their
'words' and scholarship as pedagogical, activist, and life affirming tools to enhance their progression in the academy. Scholar, professor, and cultural critic Emily J. Lordi reminds us that we as ‘scholar-writers’ must take “responsibility for one’s own language of complex thought and [present] ideas in a way that invites understanding.” Equally, for Scholar Christopher Schaberg, publishing is community work and network-building in an otherwise isolating career.

Publishing is a way of externalizing a job that can feel all too internal or insulated. Teaching can feel very isolating because a lot of the prep work, grading, and decompressing are done in relative solitude. And student appreciation (much less the respect of colleagues) can seem minimal at best — and crushingly so as that feeling accumulates over the years. Publishing becomes a way of connecting with a broad network of readers, colleagues, and students you will never meet, but who read your work and are influenced, piqued, or inspired by your writing. Publishing means building a community of writers, editors, and venues that are dedicated to scholarly work — indeed, to your scholarly work, however esoteric, traditional, or experimental it may be.

This "special issue" provides a platform for the NOMMO Scholars Collective to explore and acknowledge the academic contributions, strengths, insights, new knowledge, methodological innovations, historical re-envisioning, and contemporary interrogations required by an ever-changing society seeking liberatory routes for a better tomorrow. Through this endeavor, NSC contributors offer insights, challenges, triumphs, and reconsiderations as Black and Brown scholars consistently working to inspire future scholars while creating new knowledge for this brave new world.

References


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1 Lordi 2014.
2 Schaberg 2016.