

## Preface by Kira Herff

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I am on the phone with my dad. The device is squeezed between my shoulder and ear, as I unlock the door. I take a second set of keys from the letterbox. I pause in the hallway in front of the flat. The lock gives way with a small click, the sound carrying into the empty rooms beyond. My reply to my father is muffled, yet it seems to echo through the silence.

I look around. Everything is clean and tidy. The kitchen stands bare, its grey concrete floor stained and rough. I am early. My appointment with the care-taker is in twenty minutes. I take a deep breath, sit down on the windowsill in the living room, and turn my attention back to my father. He recently had an accident, and we have been talking on the phone since then every day. I have been sitting there for scarcely two minutes when the doorbell rings. I cut my father off and walk through the empty room.

It used to be a cosy room with lots of fairy lights and books, crammed into a huge bookshelf. Here I have shared some of my best conversations: about academia, about what it means to be marginalized, about resistance in these current times. We spoke about how to imagine a life beyond capitalism, and how to dismantle patriarchal and heteronormative structures.

I emptied Cara's cabinets and cupboards a few days ago. It was a warm day. Boxes were packed to the beat of good music, as I hurried back and forth through the flat. Once I had started emptying the huge bookshelf, I stopped the music and fell silent. Seeing all the wonderful female authors' names rushing through my hands as I put their books into boxes moved me to tears. This profound sentiment of immense gratitude towards the exceptional and extraordinary women who have committed their thoughts to paper. They were women—women who wrote.

As Hélène Cixous says in her text *The Laugh of the Medusa*: “Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own move-

ment.” All these names, all these books I held in my hands, were exactly that: tangible proof, the materialization of women who wrote.

Women who raised their voices from a position of suppression, questioning the colonial and imperialist framework of the Western scientific system and forming a queer-feminist, decolonial worldview.

It was a very precious moment, sitting amidst the chaos, feeling a thin film of sweat on my arms, and realizing that I am in the flat of a woman who also writes. A woman who embodies exactly the thinking of all these authors and philosophers. Cara is both an academic and a non-academic author, and in her work she continues this legacy. Helene Cixous urges us: “Write, let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man; not the imbecilic capitalist machinery [...].” Cara has been doing exactly this for as long as I have known her.

Cara’s writing is clear, accessible, inspiring, and builds an imaginative structure in her thinking that is a joy to follow. What you will be reading is her PhD research, but it is evident that she always envisioned this project as a book. When I first read her thesis, I found myself taking notes and forming thoughts in the same way I do when reading books that truly transform my perspective on the world. I had a lot of fun doing it! I hope you will too, as you engage with her theory.

My mind ran through all the moments we shared before she left to pursue her doctoral studies in Canada: all the sweet moments, the long talks, and being there for each other. We formed a network of solidarity, a system of support that gives us the strength to raise our voices and to write. It is precisely this support system that kicks in as I walk to the door.

It was a very kind caretaker from a well-known German property management, carrying a tablet in front of him, who was happy to make the appointment earlier, because he heard me entering the flat. I needed to text Cara with a few questions, since Canadian addresses don’t work the same way as German ones. Then I signed the completion contract via the tablet and handed over the two sets of keys. Thankfully, the procedure was quick and straightforward.

Cara had hoped to keep the flat by subletting it, but the decision was suddenly reversed and everything had to be cleared out within three months. Situations like this are just one example of how vital a support system is for a scientist living abroad — a network of people who help you manage crises, share the burden, and give you the strength to keep going.

Academia in the West is white, patriarchal, and hierarchical. The systemic problems within the academic system are numerous and varied: abuse of power, temporary positions with no long-term prospects, the “publish or

perish” culture, excessive unpaid overtime, and uncertain and yet existential funding — just to name a few.

According to the 2022 international UNI-Safe survey, more than two-thirds of female students and staff at universities, including Professors, have experienced gender-based violence. This can be attributed to patriarchal thought patterns and hierarchies. Studies also show that first-generation academics and people with a migration background are particularly affected. Moreover, a survey from March 2024 found that the careers of BIPOC researchers in Germany depend heavily on their social environment. Supportive contacts, colleagues, and supervisors help in building a career, while the absence of networks or unsupportive supervisors can hinder it. In such cases, even individual research achievements often take a back seat.

I am one of many cogs in the necessary supportive network that allows Cara to survive as a neurodivergent woman in this system. None of this work is ever done alone; it is always the result of collective effort. Care takes many forms — sometimes as small as handing over an apartment, sometimes as simple as talking to your father every day.

One of my favorite examples that demonstrates the fundamental role of care work in knowledge production is Adam Smith. Smith’s mother, Margaret Douglas, performed the domestic and organizational care labor that enabled him to devote himself entirely to writing. From a feminist perspective, this division of labor is problematic, as it reflects historically gendered and patriarchal expectations around work and intellectual authority. Everyone knows Adam Smith’s name and associates him with his famous book, “An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations”. However, almost no one knows the name of Margaret Douglas, although her labor was equally necessary for the production of this canonical text. Yet this example highlights that intellectual work depends on care work to become possible in the first place. The invisibility of her contribution illustrates how white, male imaginaries of rationality came to define knowledge as autonomous and detached, while the labor that sustains thinking was systematically obscured. As Ciani-Sophia Hoeder puts it in “Vom Tellerwäscher zum Tellerwäscher” (*From Dishwasher to Dishwasher*): Some people work, others think. Knowledge is produced not in spite of care, but through it. This is why I want to encourage you to reach out right now to people in your own network who may be struggling within academia. The evidence is clear: the academic system in the West requires deconstruction and decolonization of its path-dependent structures and habits. Shout out to every FLINTA\* and BIPOC person fighting against and within

these structures. Cara's work, and especially her research as part of her PhD, is a thread in the fabric resisting epistemic violence and suppression.

If you are unfamiliar with the term 'epistemic violence', this thesis provides an excellent introduction to the concept, offering concrete examples. Building on this foundation, Cara's theory of a "Mathematics-Rationality-Human Continuum", outlined in the opening chapters of this book, resonated deeply with my own experience as a student of physics and (classical) philosophy. It is about who speaks, who teaches, and who feels confident enough to stand up and present a solution to a homework problem in front of the entire class. It is about who participates in discussions, which books are read, and how we decide what counts as truth.

Cara's theory raises important questions about what we consider to be valuable science and research. How, over decades, a picture of a white-masculine-neurotypical version of Rationality has evolved. How being and thinking cannot be separated from one another. How power structures shape not only our ways of thinking, but also our very understanding of what it means to be human. Perhaps your first thought when seeing the book's cover was something like: *What could possibly be wrong with mathematics?* Mathematics is often understood as a purely rational, objective discipline built on axioms; it is reproducible across time and space and is considered universal. How could one even question mathematics without holding a PhD in the subject? These are valid questions. But they reveal how deeply we have internalized a particular understanding of the "Mathematics-Rationality-Human Continuum" and how strongly we associate mathematics with neutrality and objectivity.

This book looks behind that curtain and asks why mathematics is so rarely questioned in the first place.

As you read this book, I hope you are inspired not only by the ideas on the page but also by the commitment and courage they represent. Which brings me to where I most want to end: Congratulations, Cara, on completing your PhD, and on all your dedication, situated knowledge and inspiring writing. I hope this is just the first of many forewords I'll have the chance to write, and I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to fill this space with my own perspective and words.

Let this book remind us all that change in academia is possible, but only if we support each other, resist, and keep building the networks that make such work meaningful.