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Mosaico feminista
Tejiendo conocimiento a través de las culturas
Feminist Mosaic
Weaving Knowledge Across Cultures

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Foreword

Dr. Alison Kafer

When Dr. Gloria González-López asked me to write the foreword to this collection, she highlighted the material conditions animating the course. It took place in Fall 2021, when classes at UT Austin were mostly online, and with the exception of the end-of-semester celebration, class discussion unfolded exclusively on zoom and across email. If not for COVID-19, the collection would probably never have happened. It was only because the pandemic opened up her calendar (conference and research travel put on hold) and demanded new ways of forming connection (no longer able to make small talk between classes or to bump into students in the halls or library) that Dr. González-López was able to envision and organize this anthology.

Several of the essays address the impact of the pandemic on the students' research—Mariagracia McLin Rodríguez mentions being unable to bring all her interviewees together for a group conversation, for example, and Lani Both notes the withholding of resources from migrant workers during the pandemic—but none of the pieces are themselves “about” COVID-19. What makes the anthology a “COVID-19 collection” is that it captures what it was like to be a student (and a professor) during the pandemic: forging connections through online writing exercises and shared readings, adapting one's research questions and methods to what is available remotely or via zoom, collaborating in unexpected ways. The

draft of the manuscript that Dr. González-López shared with me still contains notes in the margins—queries to the author about their intent in a particular passage, questions among the translators about wording—suggesting yet another mode of engaging across distance.

In some ways these modalities are historical artifacts of a time we are told is “over”; Governor Abbott has issued a mandate that University of Texas employees return to in-person work, few classes take place remotely, and the state legislature is considering a ban on masking in public. The promise of radical change that once seemed possible (I’m thinking here of Alanna Uthgenannt’s essay and her shared hope that the pandemic would prompt an end to the tiered wage system in the service industry) now seems even further away. We can read this anthology, then, as a snapshot in time, an artifact not only of this one “Feminist Theories” class at The University of Texas at Austin in Fall 2021, but also of what it looked and felt like to do feminist theorizing during a pandemic.

I will admit, however, to worry that this collection will become an historical artifact in a whole different sense: the Texas legislature has signaled a willingness in 2025 to come after departments, programs, and curricula it deems “divisive” and “discriminatory.” While they have kept their language deliberately vague, as they did with the 2023 ban on “diversity, equity, and inclusion,” it’s clear that they’ve set their sights on ethnic and gender studies. Some programs across the state have already closed or reduced their course offerings in anticipation of these changes, and it’s not entirely inconceivable that by the time this book finds its way to you, dear reader, that the Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies department that housed this course will be shuttered or at the very least hamstrung by new restrictions and cuts.

How, then, to respond? The attack on ethnic and gender studies comes as universities are intensifying efforts to surveil and restrict speech on campus, demonstrating an increased willingness to call in militarized responses to campus activism. The coalition of students, staff, and faculty that led the fight against the ban on DEI—a coalition spearheaded by people of color, queer folks, and queer people of color—has continued its organizing efforts, lobbying politicians, testifying at hearings, writing op-eds and speaking with reporters, and refusing to be silent in the face of fascism.

All of that is necessary. So, too, is this book. Collections like this one demonstrate what gender and ethnic studies make possible, offering a potent rejoinder to conservative attacks on feminist thought. This anthology represents an opportunity to delve

deeply into a topic of interest, craft arguments based on research and study, receive feedback from peers and other scholars, and revise accordingly. Each of these students were encouraged to keep reading and learn something new. Contrary to willful stereotypes, gender and ethnic studies aren't monolithic, but rather contain multiple perspectives and approaches. (Parker Kirew's contribution illustrates this point, as she ruminates on tensions among feminists, identifying with some positions and refusing others.)

Taken as a whole, the essays in this collection demonstrate the wide variety of methodologies, orientations, and commitments at work in feminist theory and "Feminist Theories": Katherin Patricia Tairo-Quispe provides an example of how to critically engage with cultural productions, surfacing the "sexist filters" at work in interpretations of "Valicha," an iconic Peruvian song; Evalyn Stow highlights strategies for undoing archival erasures, describing the creation of the Lesbian Herstory Archives and the work of community activists to preserve queer histories; and Jessica Olson, Brenda Moreira Marques, and Brianna Pippens offer experiments with form (Olson weaves her own poetry into her analysis of disability climate justice, Marques plays with text boxes as a way of showcasing theoretical frameworks, and Pippens transforms each contributor's argument into visual form). Several of the contributors address violence, but they do so in diverse ways, drawing on different scholarly literatures and focusing on different sites (Hnin Hnin Oo, for example, analyzes sexual violence against women in the context of the Burmese military, while Shannon Woods examines school shootings in the United States through the lenses of trauma and temporality). The collection begins and ends with insights from and engagements with bell hooks: Alexis Bigelow takes up hooks' "revolutionary pedagogy of resistance," offering a womanist theory of teaching grounded in "care, love, and accountability," while Dr. Gloria González-López reflects on hooks' influence on her own teaching, sharing some of the writing exercises and approaches she employed during this class.

While this one cohort of students has graduated or advanced to the next stage of their studies, new students have joined their ranks. As I write this, Dr. González-López is teaching another iteration of "Feminist Theories," introducing students to theorists ranging from the Combahee River Collective to Sara Ahmed. In her class and in other Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies courses across UT Austin, students are discovering the galvanizing work of feminist theory, especially scholarship connected to transnational organizing and queer-of-color critique. As the students gathered in

this collection did in the Fall of 2021, students in the Fall of 2024 are forging connections through their shared engagement with questions of power and resistance, agency and accountability, imagined futures and ongoing histories. They are attending teach-ins about the genocide in Gaza, discovering the innovations of Indigenous artists at the museum, and deconstructing the attacks on queer and trans youth that pervade the airwaves. Through their course readings and discussions, through meticulous and iterative writing projects, these students are asking new questions, making unexpected connections, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines and methods. They are diving deep into scholarly literature, learning how to craft arguments and use evidence to make a difference. Turn the page and join in.