

preface

THIS YEAR, 2022, MARKS THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY of *Feminist Studies*. In the spirit of retrospection and celebration, our first issue of the year commemorates the fortieth birthdays of two anthologies that heralded major innovations in feminist theory: *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Persephone Press, 1981; Kitchen Table Press, 1983) and *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* (The Feminist Press, 1982). The writing in this issue reflects the deeply personal impact that these books have had on scholars' intellectual, political, and emotional development since the time of their publication. Several of these essays articulate and historicize concepts from these anthologies that have since become influential in gender studies, later termed "intersectionality," "women of color, and "queer theory." Other essays contribute new approaches to feminist theory developed in the last forty years. In addition to scholarly articles, this special issue includes two art features as well as a cluster of creative prose and poetry reflecting on *This Bridge Called My Back* and *But Some of Us Are Brave* curated by our creative writing editor, Alexis Pauline Gumbs. As a whole, this issue of *Feminist Studies* explores and expands the categories developed in those original two anthologies.

The categories "women of color" and "queer" may seem disparate. However, it is precisely women of color feminisms that centered the voices of lesbian activists, writers, and scholars who insisted on acknowledging

the various parts of their identities, thereby paving the way for anti-essentialist understandings of gender, race, and sexuality. The category “women of color” realigned thinking about gender, ethnic heritage, and “race.” It was preceded by the category of “people of color,” which aimed to unite all persons who had been targeted by white supremacy through a common and liberatory political alignment. The category of “queer theory” reoriented thinking about both sexuality and gender. These categories, which are anti-essentialist, question supposed boundaries between nature and nurture, between the biological and the cultural. These categories were understood in differing, sometimes overlapping dimensions. Both “women of color” and “queer” assumed and realigned older majoritarian categories that once seemed self-evident although they were not. That is, new categories regarding race and ethnicity assumed a stable background of “white” dominance, at least in the United States, although the boundaries of whiteness, as well as of other racialized categories, continue to be contested. New categories defining gender identity and sexual orientation, which were also apparently self-evident though still under scrutiny, were shown to be unstable and continually contested so that categories like “woman” and “women” no longer seemed self-evident. The essays in this issue illuminate how the concepts “women of color” and “queer” opened up new approaches to theory at the same time that they introduced new exclusions and new opportunities for action and coalition.

Samantha Pinto and Jennifer C. Nash envision the potential of *This Bridge Called My Back* and *But Some of Us Are Brave* as a corrective to the limited scripts that have emerged in feminist theorizing. In their article, “Then and Now: Women of Color Originalism and the Anthological Impulse in Women’s and Gender Studies,” they show how these two pioneering anthologies continue to circulate alongside “women of color,” a term that these texts helped produce as “legible and coherent,” yet one that still remains undertheorized. Treating the anthologies as performances of “bridging,” Pinto and Nash describe their visions of struggle for an autonomous institutional space for Black women’s studies. They claim that “intersectionality has become the institutional cure for women’s studies and the intellectual property of Black feminism.” They argue that these anthologies self-consciously call attention “to how the field has created, crafted, and performed difference in the women’s studies classroom” in order to situate the category “women of color” within this interdiscipline.

In a complementary essay that describes “Revisiting *This Bridge Called My Back*” decades after its original appearance, Paulina Jones-Torregrosa describes the impact the book had upon her as an undergraduate, leading her to insist that we must not settle “for less than freedom even in the most private aspects of our lives.” Such a commitment requires continually crossing the “river of difference” to discover how *This Bridge Called My Back* theorizes anew about the nature of collectivity and thereby proliferates the anthology’s multiple, rich meanings. She insists “that its time is always now.” Jones-Torregrosa revisits the original context of the anthology to note that women of color now resist “putting their bodies on the line, to negate the physical and affective labor that white feminists asked of them in the search for unity” in the 1980s and 1990s.

Turning to *But Some of Us Are Brave*, SaraEllen Strongman cites Cheryl Clarke’s 1982 assessment of that book’s importance in promoting “the revisionary and resuscitating nature of its contents, including the lists — bibliographies, syllabi, and other references” and in staking out “Black feminism’s relationship to the academy.”

Both pivotal anthologies, *This Bridge Called My Back* and *But Some of Us Are Brave*, have inspired and enlightened broad feminist audiences. For Tala Khanmalek and heidi andrea restrepo rhodes, the anthologies brought “guidance on survival, solidarity, and survival through solidarity” to them as “the descendants of immigrants and refugees living on occupied Indigenous lands.” The authors credit these anthologies for advancing the intersectional Black feminist anti-imperialism of pioneering texts such as the Combahee River Collective Statement. Furthermore, they connect the “oppressive conditions” of their lives to the “embodiments we awaken to daily as two queer, chronically ill femmes of color” who suffer from the joint burdens of “capitalism’s toxic remnants plus colonialism’s hefty cross and boot.” Yet they do not see themselves as victims but instead proclaim: “Beauty lives between us. And freedom too.”

Besides celebrating the two pioneering anthologies *This Bridge Called My Back* and *But Some of Us Are Brave*, another theme of this issue is the call to extend and complete the vision of social change articulated in those volumes. In her essay “‘I Give You a World Incomplete’: Pat Parker’s Revolution and the Unfinished Legacy of 1970s Feminist Radicalisms,” Tamara Lea Spira renews the call to feminist revolution she finds in the unpublished notebooks of Pat Parker, a Black queer feminist who

was quiet yet “full of rage.” Spira finds rage an appropriate a response to the United States in the current millennium as it was in the 1970s: “no queer or feminist or radical of color is immune from the systemic violence upon which dominant power is predicated under imperialism and white supremacy.”

The interview that Kelsey Leonard, Chrystos, Max Wolf Valerio, and Jo Carrillo conducted on the subject of Indigenous feminism takes a more hopeful approach to the continuing work of feminist social transformation. “We are our ‘ancestors’ wildest dreams’ . . . birthed into existence, and wherever our journeys may take us, the paths we walk on have been paved by a legacy of Indigenous women who persisted and persevered,” they say, describing their words as “medicine” that is simultaneously “inclusive,” “regenerative,” and “reciprocal.” The interviewees recall that Jo Carrillo typed the original manuscript of *This Bridge Called My Back* because she owned an electric typewriter, while Gloria Anzaldúa instructed Carrillo as the youngest contributor and Max Wolf Valerio encouraged the use of “woman of color” as a “unifying term” building toward a “communitarian” process.

Much like the participants in the interview, Emily Cushman imagines “Constructing a Community of Courageous Women” in her essay, which is centered on collage artist María Berrío whose work depicts strong, resilient pregnant women positioned at the southern border of the United States. Complementing the visual approach in Cushman’s essay is the attention to sound in Sidra Lawrence’s essay, “Reconjuring the Wound: Auditory Ghosts and Crossing the Bridge,” which shows appreciation for the original work and seeks to “borrow the strength from other women,” especially those who have experienced trauma.

Other contributors reflect on how *This Bridge Called My Back* and *But Some of Us Are Brave* not only impacted their activism and scholarship but also their teaching. The seven scholars who collaborated to write the forum “Epistemic Agitations and Pedagogies for Justice: A Conversation around *Hungry Translations: Relearning the World through Radical Vulnerability*,” Emek Ergun, Nida Sajid, Keisha-Khan Perry, Sirisha Naidu, AnaLouise Keating, Sangeeta Kamat, and Richa Nagar, seek to develop epistemology and pedagogy in the interest of advancing justice, one of the key terms referenced throughout *Hungry Translations*. They suggest that feminist scholars show their willingness to be “radically vulnerable” in order to “participate not merely as detached analysts,” “but as active

political beings who labor to cocreate just worlds. . . .” Thus, they display a “collective commitment to troubling inherited meanings of the social” in order to build new coalitions. They describe their position as one of “post-oppositionality” grounded in “collective pedagogical praxis.” The telling of stories becomes a chief means of connecting with others while reconfiguring both the intimate and the global. Such a vision also implies a new form of pedagogy that can revise traditional classroom practices while refusing predictable scripts, genres, or techniques.

Similarly, in “Pedagogies of Relationality through *This Bridge Called My Back*,” Nicole Charles envisages the anthology as displaying a bridge to theory in the flesh, uncovering a practice of embodiment that furthers decolonization and “justice (not just representation)” along with an ethics of pedagogy. In her review essay, Megan Moodie discusses four recent books that “challenge the conventional border between research and creative work in ways that echo” *This Bridge Called My Back* and *But Some of Us Are Brave*. Moodie shows the importance of alternative ways of knowing for those engaged in projects that defy the conventional scholarly/artistic division, noting that pathbreaking works such as *This Bridge Called My Back* would not exist if their authors had “waited for the stamp of a legitimating university press.” Kristie Soares, too, reflects on “*This Bridge Called My Back*, Forty Years Later,” to further a practice of “Anti-racist Feminist Pedagogy and Organizing” that can connect lesbian activism and efforts to counter anti-Black violence today, showing how anti-racist coalition-building can intersect with feminism.

This issue of *Feminist Studies* includes an unprecedented number of creative writing pieces that complement its theoretical essays. Our creative writing editor, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, has assembled a collection of pieces from authors who were part of these groundbreaking anthologies or whose work has been directly informed by them. Gumbs provides an introduction to this collection of writing in order to describe how and why she gathered together this particular group of authors: Akasha Gloria Hull, Cheryl Clarke, doris diosa davenport, Cheryl Boyce-Taylor, Asha French, Sharon Bridgforth, Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, Alexis De Veaux, and Sokari Ekine.

In addition to the pieces curated by Gumbs, this issue also includes several other creative works. Reanae McNeal’s “Bridges: Harriet Tubman and Women of Color Tales of Resistance” is, among other things, a love letter to Harriet Tubman via women of color feminism and a plea for

anyone affected by racism and misogyny to turn rage into resistance. Anna M. Moncada Storti also looks to those who came before her for insight and inspiration in “‘So, I turn inside’: Overcome by the Unbearable, Seeing Myself in Michiyo Fukaya.” As Fukaya calls out to the Vermont wilderness about the absence of “Asian American feminist voice,” Storti answers with recognition and a determination to turn inward on her own terms. Nathalie Lozano-Neira also wrestles with a literary ancestor in “Unsettling My Journey as a *Prieta*.” Using Gloria Anzaldúa’s “La Prieta” from *This Bridge Called My Back* as inspiration, Lozano-Neira explores the still under-recognized beauty of her “*piel oscura* (dark skin) and *Indigenidad* (Indigeneity).” By fostering self-love and cultivating solidarity with Indigenous nations and Black people, she can declare triumphantly, “the colonizers did not win.”

Finally, Shoniqa Roach’s piece, “Two Erotic Lessons I Learned from My Mother (and Other Women Who Nourished Me),” uses Audre Lorde’s method of “biomythography” for a personal essay on Black queer women’s sexuality, mothering, and erotic autonomy.

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