

pedagogical effect of the text: figuring critical inquiry as an unfinished and contested process rather than a teleological self-improvement.

Near the end of their introduction to the volume, Disch and Hawkesworth position feminist theory as “what Latour (1988, 43–49) calls an ‘obligatory point of passage,’ a body of knowledge that must be taken into account by scholars, regardless of whether they have a particular interest in women, gender, or sexuality” (11). I suggest that the pedagogical dimensions of feminist theory epitomized by this volume are essential to this centripetal force pulling other modes of knowledge production into a feminist matrix. Whether creating possibilities for the classroom, challenging established modes of knowledge production, or insisting upon and modeling self-critical scholarship, the *Handbook* compels one to grasp the relationship between feminist theory and pedagogical endeavors.

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REFERENCE

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Profusion, Contestation, Missing Pieces

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Although I have not read *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory* cover to cover, the chapters I have read confirm the editors’ definition of feminist thinking as an intellectual endeavor aimed at “denaturaliz[ing] that which passes for difference, . . . challeng[ing] the aspiration to produce universal and impartial knowledge, and . . . engag[ing] the complexity of power relations through intersectional analysis” (4). It is not possible to consistently chart the immensity of this task in a few pages. The reflections that follow are thus general and limited, highlighting insights, questions, and gaps that struck my own chords, as a feminist who has

been inspired by and engaged in transnational intellectual and political feminist projects but who has remained connected with the politics of the global South. My professional and political trajectory has not unfolded in an academic setting, but instead mostly at the often uncomfortable crossroads between feminist thinking and praxis. My criticisms in no way deny the quality of the individual chapters, particularly with regard to their successful retracing of the complex and often contradictory genealogies of feminist theorizing, which in some cases go back to the nineteenth century.

The *Handbook's* editors caution readers to carefully avoid teleological accounts that portray feminist theorizing as something that erupted from nowhere in the 1970s. Though I agree with this, the 1970s did initiate a period of expanding boundaries and pluralization of feminist theorizing, which is reflected in the scope of the *Handbook*. Even if this expansion cannot be defined as a “beginning,” it has propelled the long-standing and arduous feminist task of undoing women’s subordination in entirely new and creative directions. Feminist theorists are now probing uncharted territories with regard to gender, sexuality, racial/ethnic, and colonial traces in cultures, the state, law, religious doctrine, and economics. They have devoted great energy to dislodging naturalized assumptions and descriptors that obscure the understanding of how sexual, gender, and racialized subjects are constituted, othered, and dehumanized. They have also pushed the critique of Enlightenment humanism beyond the male-human synonym, destabilizing the fiction of the gender binary and interrogating the bedrock of anthropocentrism. Feminist theorizing is also raising troubling questions about time and temporality. These inquiries were not going on when I began seriously engaging with feminist thinking in the 1970s. More importantly, feminist theorizing is no longer the exclusive province of cis-female bodies — something well reflected by the *Handbook*. All these changes are welcome, even if they make it increasingly difficult to say what, exactly, feminist theory is about.

This proliferation and pluralization cannot be fully understood, however, without reference to the academic legitimizing of feminist and gender studies, a process that is not without its contradictions. If this legitimacy has been one main driver of knowledge production, it has also placed feminist theorizing closer to the charmed circles of power and distanced it from the lived worlds of feminist politics. We must also acknowledge a huge North-South imbalance in terms of human and

research capacity in knowledge production, an aspect that will be discussed later.

My emphasis on this blooming of feminist theory and its connections to institutionalization is not meant to suggest that feminist theorizing has moved from the margins to the center of the world's dominant epistemologies. In the twenty-first century, realpolitik gender mainstreaming often means feminist depoliticization. But, as in the past, feminist theorizing is still fundamentally about contesting power structures and flows. It implies a continuous labor of critically amending dominant (or even not so dominant) conceptualizations and practices. This can be easily grasped when feminist elaborations on bodies and subject formation are contrasted with dominant biological and biomedical scientific explanations, the conventional wisdom of legal scholars, or — yet more compellingly — religious doctrines. But, as the *Handbook* shows, feminist theorists are also devoted to contesting the theoretical sources from which they draw inspiration.

As captured by the introduction and by the detailed genealogies laid out in “Sex/Gender” (Mara Viveros Vigoya) and “Sexual Difference” (Alison Stone), thinkers have long wrestled not only with liberals but also with Marx, Freud, Lévi-Strauss, and Lacan. “Biopolitics” (Ruth A. Miller), in particular, accurately charts feminist critiques of Foucault's theoretical minimizing of the woman question and gendered sexual violence, as well as of the “fear of the body” and the “bann[ing of vitality] from the juridical realm” that pervades Agamben's meditations on the entrenched biopolitical grids of democracy and rights (67, 69). Another illustration of the courageous feminist disposition to reveal the limits and biases of past and present intellectual production, even within “friendly” circles, is provided by Breny Mendoza's excellent review of postcolonial and decolonial theorizing, which examines the liminal position occupied in this stream by feminist thinkers such as Gloria Anzaldúa and María Lugones — a critique that is never undertaken in wider intellectual circles.

More significantly, feminist theorizing also contests and interrogates itself. The *Handbook* does not avoid grappling with the heterogeneous and often divergent directions of feminist theorizing and the controversies these imply. As mentioned earlier, distinctive standpoints and tensions can be identified across the book's chapters, and in some cases, these differences and divergences shape the core of their respective chapters' arguments. The chapter on “Sexualities” (Leila J. Rupp and Carly Thomsen), for example, draws a sharp and clear epistemological distinction between constructivist and poststructural theories of gender and sexuality. More substantively, perhaps, the fissure between the 1990s

linguistic and the 2000s materialist turns can also be tracked across chapters. And the chapter on “Intersectionality” (Brittney Cooper) directly addresses an ongoing feminist U.S. political controversy. It retraces how this concept, originally crafted by black feminists to critically tackle the interlocking of systems of oppression and power in legal procedures and institutional responses to discrimination, has been gradually reconfigured as an account of identity. Then it examines how, as an effect of this dislocation, the concept would come to be criticized for stabilizing intact identity categories, whose legal recognition may collude with dominant state and neoliberal orders. Cooper rejects this criticism, arguing that when the state interpellates racial identities through violence, recognition is resistance and not collusion (395).

This debate, in my view, throws light on the thorny question of the complicated transits and disjunctions between feminist theorizing and politics, a key topic that is not exactly prominent in the *Handbook*. Cross-fertilization between politics and theorizing is referred to in the introduction and in a few of the chapters I have read. But the potentialities and fault lines of translating thinking into political action, a process that, as Hannah Arendt observed, always has its own uncontrollable course, are not substantively examined. The two exceptions are Cooper’s chapter on “Intersectionality” and the last section on “Norms and Normalization” (Dean Spade and Craig Willse), which analyzes how the theoretical critiques of normalization and racialized and sexual disciplinary laws and norms opened the ground for U.S. feminist groups to contest the primacy of same-sex marriage in LGBTQ politics and to engage more fully with the black movement’s anticarceral politics. This “lapse” in the *Handbook* suggests that the time may be ripe for feminists to revisit the classical dyad of theory and praxis.

The *Handbook* is, however, attentive to the effects of how, where, and by whom knowledge is produced. The introduction devotes a whole section to this question, interrogating the biases deriving from “the sex of the knower” and dominant “conceptions of objectivity that posit a ‘view from nowhere’” (7). It also briefly addresses the implications of where knowledge production is located. It is significant that the *Handbook’s* contributors are a very diverse group: black and trans scholars, diasporic academics from various parts of the world, and Latin America scholars such as Mara Viveros Vigoya, Marianne Marchand, Rocío del Carmen Osornor Velázquez, and Ki-young Shin who do not work in the United States or Europe.

Postcolonialism and decolonization are reviewed in chapters other than the one devoted to the topic, and the bibliographies show prolific citations of writers from the global South. Even so, it remains strongly U.S. centered in terms of framing, focuses, issues, and controversies. The United States is a powerhouse of feminist conceptual production, however, and being able to map out what is playing on its stage at any given moment is always an enlightening and provocative exercise because, sooner or later, these topics spill over globally. Even so, projects such as the *Handbook* should, in my view, be decentered from the start, not simply to redress the North-South imbalances that I have mentioned earlier but also to enrich feminist theorizing itself. Let me give you two illustrations of what I mean.

The excellent chapter on “Intersexuality, Transgender, and Transsexuality” (Talia Mae Bettcher) provides an entirely new perspective on the history of the toxic conflict in the United States between radical feminists (Radfem) and trans and intersex communities. While points of convergence exist with places such as Brazil, where the Radfem presence and virulence has intensified in recent years, the route of the controversy is not the same, in particular because it implies a combined attack on trans people, travesti, and sex workers, figures that are entirely absent from the chapter’s narrative. This disjunction will certainly be more pronounced in Asia and the Pacific, where the configurations and meaning of sexual identities, in particular of trans identities, are radically distinctive and trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs) are nowhere to be seen. Apart from questions of contextual historicizing, these differences also imply that the concepts of identity invalidation and reality enforcement that are central to Bettcher’s argument do not automatically apply everywhere.

It is also my view that feminist state theorizing can be reframed and enriched through the use of global South lenses. Such a shift can propel new investigations of modalities of engagement with states and features of governmentality that do not squarely fit into the liberal paradigm (and its critiques) that dominates U.S. and European elaborations on this matter. I am also convinced that thinking about the state in locations south of the equator will not so easily gloss over the place and meaning of religion in the contemporary political economy, especially with regard to gender, sexuality, and reproduction.

The other side of this same coin is dissemination. It is my expectation that the *Handbook*, or at least a selection of its chapters, will be translated into Spanish, Portuguese, or both in order to amplify and diversify its audience and allow for more thorough transnational feedback.

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RESPONSE

Feminist Theory as Praxis

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A handbook published by a leading academic press is a vehicle for the circulation of ideas, a site for the dissemination of knowledge, a space for the cultivation of a distinctive intellectual tradition, as well as a moment of legitimation for an academic field. Yet handbooks are not usually reviewed in scholarly journals, and for good reason: just how is any reader — even a group of them — to evaluate a multiauthor, encyclopedic project? Timothy Kaufman-Osborn was inspired to convene this symposium in the conviction that the production and publication of this *Handbook* was politically eventful. We share that conviction. And we are grateful to the contributors to this symposium for their generous engagements with *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory* and, especially, to Timothy for organizing it and inviting our response.

What set this event in motion? A feminist editor. Angela Chnapko at Oxford contacted us in 2010 because she realized that a handbook devoted to *feminist* theory was long overdue. Developing a prospectus for this magnum opus that could pass muster with anonymous reviewers and Oxford's editorial board involved two years of intellectual labor. The momentum grew through the yearlong recruitment period as chapter authors — many of them colleagues but some of whom neither of us had met in person — enthusiastically agreed to participate. By lending their talents to this project, contributors agreed that it was time to demonstrate