

## Book Review

### Feminists Confront State Violence

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This edited volume is an urgent and necessary contribution. With far-right, fascist governments and political movements emboldened worldwide – and with their enthusiastic embrace of carceral state violence as exemplified by ‘Alligator Alcatraz’ in the United States (Barría and Fojo, 2025) and the Terrorism Confinement Centre (Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo, CECOT) in El Salvador (Graham, 2025) – academia and activism need critical scholarship to help us name and contest state violence, and to create alternative visions of the state, society, and the future. Edited by Anne Gray Fischer (Assistant Professor of History and author of *The Streets Belong to Us: Sex, Race, and Police Power from Segregation to Gentrification*), Sara Matthiesen (Associate Professor of History and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and author of *Reproduction Reconceived: Family Making and the Limits of Choice after Roe v. Wade*), and Marisol LeBrón (Associate Professor in Feminist Studies and Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, and author of *Policing Life and Death: Race, Violence, and Resistance in Puerto Rico and Against Muerto Rico: Lessons from the Verano Boricua*), this volume has been developed with a real sense of care and coherence. There is a clear flow from one contribution to the next, and the editors have evidently made a conscious effort to ensure representation of a wide range of historical and geographical contexts. For me, one of the themes running through the – and its most significant contribution – is the importance of foregrounding individuals and collectives whose contributions might otherwise be neglected by the dominant historical and feminist narrative. The editors and contributors have been successful in their aim of creating ‘an archive of feminist strategies, practices, and visions that struggle to radically remake worlds from inside this one’ (Fischer, Matthiesen, and LeBrón, 2024: 2). They provide rich theorisations of violence and of care. They also offer a great sense of hope despite the seriousness of the subject matter and the historic and ongoing oppression we all face: the struggles may be many, but so are we.

#### FEATURES

The collection opens with a tightly written and moving account of an aspect of AIDS activism and prison activism of which I was previously unaware: incarcerated people organising against HIV/AIDS in prison and jails across the United States in the late 1980s and 1990s. In ‘The AIDS Quilt in Prison: Care Work in and against the Carceral State’, Emily K. Hobson effectively situates this history in the wider story of anti-carceral practices. She also uses it to challenge the binary of politics/care, demonstrating how care, grieving, and memorialisation are often politics themselves. Highlighting a variety of examples from prisons and jails nationwide, Hobson’s article is a tribute to ‘the power of a craft gendered as women’s work to organize community, challenge structures of harm, and imagine freedom beyond both prison and AIDS’ (Hobson, 2024, p.23).

Indicative of this collection's commitment to meaningful representation across disciplines, methodologies, times, and geographies, Mónica A. Jiménez's 'Searching for Monse' combines autobiography and history to reconstruct best as possible through 'whispers...echoes and traces' the history of female Puerto Rican nationalist Monserrate López de Victoria (Jiménez, 2024). Jiménez first weaves together the different entry points she had into learning about "Titi Monse" – family stories, historical records – before turning to how Monse's story exemplified the carceral colonial violence inflicted on Puerto Rico, and its reverberations through a family and across generations. Arrested for participating in a nationalist uprising in late 1950, Monserrate and seven other women were incarcerated in Arecibo District Jail under the wide-ranging anti-sedition Law 53. Monserrate spent twenty-two months in the jail. During that time, she and her fellow prisoners engaged in 'acts of radical care and of refusal – refusal to allow the colonial state to demean them or their dignity' through providing emotional and material support (Jiménez, 2024). There is a real sense of loss throughout the piece: the author's own sense of loss at not having known her Titi Monse better, a sense of loss for the independent Puerto Rico that could and should have been, and for the life that Monserrate and her fellow revolutionaries could and should have enjoyed had Puerto Rico not been subjected to US imperialism.

Continuing the welcome focus on Latin America and the Caribbean, Kaysha Corinealdi's article 'Feminist Educators against State Neglect' provides a fascinating insight into the role of teachers in the Panamanian feminist movement during the early- to mid-twentieth century. Focusing on Felicia Santizo and Sara Sotillo, Corinealdi illustrates how feminist teachers in some of the most deprived parts of Panama 'intertwined education, feminism, and organizing' to contest state neglect, which was often very much by design and impacted the poor, working-class and Afro-descendant communities most of all (Corinealdi, 2024). Corinealdi elegantly interweaves and makes clear to the reader the personal, specific elements of Santizo and Sotillo's stories with the broader power dynamics shaping their experiences. Central America is far too often given little attention in academic scholarship; Corinealdi's work is testament to the importance of learning about and from the region.

Romina A. Green Rioja, meanwhile, adds an important layer to research on feminism in Argentina by foregrounding the role of working-class women in shaping Argentinian feminist praxis. In 'From "Armies of Love" to Demanding Legal Abortion: Piqueteras and Women Workers at the Forefront of Forging New Feminist Politics in Argentina (1990-2005)', Green Rioja charts the emergence of feminist praxes among working-class and poor women during the brutal recession of the 1990s, and how they brought their experience to bear on the Argentinian feminist movement. In response to the male-dominated workers' movement's indifference and hostility, working-class and poor women began to organise *espacios de mujeres* 'to discuss gender-related issues and create sorority', with these spaces becoming 'a bridge between the social movements and the burgeoning feminist movement, politically transforming both spaces in the process' (Green Rioja, 2024). Green Rioja also makes it very clear why abortion and reproductive autonomy were central concerns for these women and for the feminist movement as a whole: '72 percent of the women who died due to complications from abortion lived in the northern provinces, the areas hardest hit by the recession' (73).

The importance of reproductive autonomy/freedom is also explored in Spencer Beswick's article "'To Repulse the State from Our Uteri": Anarcha-feminism, Reproductive Freedom, and Dual Power.' As with many of the contributions in this volume, Beswick's article enriches the dominant historical narrative by focusing on an individual or collective whose contributions might otherwise be overlooked. In this case, the focus is on how USA anarcha-feminists 'mobilized to defend abortion clinics from the Far Right and taught themselves how to perform reproductive care at the grassroots level' in the 1990s (Beswick, 2024). In contrast to the liberal feminist approach of petitioning the state for reforms, anarcha-feminists understood abortion restrictions as 'a form of state violence' and 'the state itself as the ultimate patriarchal institution and the source of much of the violence they faced' (90-91). While reading this article, I was struck by how contemporary feminist discourse is rightly moving to understand abortion access in these terms, and how it would benefit the movement to revisit some of the praxis Beswick outlines here. Alternative understandings of abortion care emerging from feminist praxis that are also worth engaging and that have some parallels with anarcha-feminism include work on *acompañamiento* and self-managed abortion by Madeleine Belfrage (2023), Lucía Berro Pizzarossa and Rishita Nandagiri (2021), Deirdre Duffy, Cordelia Freeman and Sandra Rodríguez Castaña (2023), and Julia McReynolds-Pérez, Katrina Kimport, Chiara Bercu, Carolina Cisternas, Emily Wilkinson Salamea, Ruth Zurbriggen, and Heidi Moseson (2023).

The next article, 'Taking Over, Living-In: Black Feminist Geometry and the Radical Politics of Repair' by Randi Gill-Sadler and Erica R. Edwards, keeps the focus on the US but in this instance celebrates the contributions of Black feminist cultural workers such as Toni Cade Bambara. Through a sophisticated analysis of Bambara's work – which spanned anthologies, novels, short stories screenplays, and films – Gill-Sadler and Edwards detail how Black and women of colour feminists have long recognised the inherent violence and uncaring nature of the state, the risk of ideas and practices of care being co-opted by the state, and how to resist that co-optation. In doing so, they remind us all to question 'vertical lines of power', and instead invest our time, energy and care in 'contra-state forms of care and repair' (Gill-Sadler & Edwards, 2024, p.125).

Heather Berg's article "'If You're Going to Be Beautiful, You Better Be Dangerous': Sex Worker Community Defense' is similarly concerned with alternative forms of care and defence beyond and in direct opposition to the state. Focusing on Clandestine Whores Network, Hookers Army Los Angeles, and Who Revolution, Berg discusses how these groups have developed reading groups, self-defence classes, and mutual aid networks that refuse 'both sex workers' state-produced vulnerability to violence and the state's monopoly on violence' (Berg, 2024, p.131). Berg provides an insightful account of these practices and does not shy away from acknowledging and making space for some of the divergent positions within the transformative justice/anti-carceral/abolitionist sex worker and feminist theory and praxis in development.

The three Interventions on sex work in South Africa, the feminist uprising in Iran, and the history of Palestinian women's and feminist organising against both colonial and patriarchal violence provide welcome international perspectives. In 'Organizing for the Decriminalization of Sex Work in South Africa', India Thusi provides an impressively concise but comprehensive analysis of how sex workers in South Africa negotiate their relationship with the state by organising to demand decriminalisation, doing safety work, and simply trying to survive day-to-day in the face of intersectional systemic violence. She makes a compelling case – based on ethnographic fieldwork with sex workers in Johannesburg, interviews with police officers, and secondary source analysis – that decriminalisation is an important first step in enabling sex workers 'to imagine the material reality that they would want the state to provide for them in a post-decriminalization world' (Thusi, 2024, p.161). This need to contest existing forms of oppression and imagine society otherwise is also central to Manijeh Moradian's contribution 'Embodying Revolution: Situating Iran within Transnational Feminist Solidarities' which, as the title indicates, draws out the importance of transnational feminist solidarities to maintaining a movement and realising its ambitions. Moradian contextualises the emergence of the Women, Life, Freedom (Jin, Jiyan, Azadi in Kurdish) movement within Jineology, an ideology adopted by Kurdish organisations across the region that foregrounds 'democratic confederalism', socialism, and the self-emancipation of women (Moradian, 2024). From Kurdistan to the rest of Iran, the Women, Life, Freedom movement has since reverberated worldwide, shaping and being shaped by other feminist struggles against gendered, sexualised, and state-perpetrated violence (166-7). Taking the work of Feminist for Jina as an example, Moradian emphasises the importance of nurturing South-South 'solidarity from below' among revolutionary feminist movements worldwide (169). For those who like me were excited to read more about the movement after reading this brief article, Moradian's 2022 monograph *This Flame Within: Iranian Revolutionaries in the United States* will be required reading.

A particularly crucial contribution given the ongoing Palestinian genocide, Jennifer Mogannam's piece 'Feminist Intifada: Palestinian Women through a Century of Organizing' deftly articulates the connection between the specificities of the Palestinian situation and the broader power dynamics that have shaped it. Similar to Paola Zichi's work on Mandatory Palestine (2021), Mogannam makes it clear that 'a Palestinian anticolonial feminist politics has been brewing since modern, Western forms of colonialism were imposed on the lands and peoples of Palestine' (Mogannam, 2024, p.171). Focusing on the emergence of the tal'at ('We're going out') movement in 2019 and the development of the transnational Palestinian Feminist Collective, Mogannam situates them in their broader historical context as part of a long, proud tradition of women's and feminist organizing dedicated to challenging 'the duality of being a subject of both colonialism and patriarchy and the entanglement of the two' (177). This is a vital contribution accessible to Anglophone audiences on Palestinian feminisms, along with work by Ajour (2021), Elia (2023), Hammami (2023), and Shalhoub-Kevorkian et al. (2014), to name just a few.

One of the joys of research for me is when I discover a new feminist hero. Along with Titi Monse, Felicia Santizo, Sara Sotillo, and Toni Bambara, Kipp Dawson is now one of them. In their visual essay "'We Came Together and We Fought'": Kipp Dawson and Resistance to State Violence in US Social Movements since the 1950s', Jessie B. Ramey and Catherine A. Evans share material from two archival collections – the Kipp Dawson Papers at the University of Pittsburgh and interviews with Dawson that are part of the Women Miners Oral History Project at West Virginia University – that document Dawson's lifelong commitment to anti-racist, anti-war, feminist, LGBTQI, labour, and educational justice activism. The archival material and biography discussed in this essay 'demonstrate the role of women's radical collaboration in organizing both resistance to state violence and alternative visions for the nation' (Ramey & Evans, 2024, p.182). Although the focus is on the remarkable Kipp Dawson, it is evident throughout that both she and the authors are committed to an 'intentional, transformational, and diffuse form of leadership' that they term 'radical collaboration' (181-2).

Along with there being much to learn from and emulate when it comes to Dawson's praxis, this account of her life also makes for fascinating reading. Dawson has worked not only within and across a range of social justice movements at crucial moments in modern USA and world history but also spent thirteen years as a miner and twenty-two years as a public-school teacher. In reading her story, I wondered how many other people with such rich and varied lives have been part of social justice movements throughout history. It threw into sharp relief the importance of documenting and celebrating as many of those people as possible as part of the very feminist projects of recuperating histories at risk of being lost and reimagining better futures. A truly principled, admirable

person, it is fitting that this edited collection finished with Dawson's words — 'We know what the goal is: a world where everyone and the planet itself are shared with love and dignity' (Ramey & Evans, 2024, p.191).

It is something of a prerequisite for reviews to offer constructive criticism; I confess I struggled to find any points of critique or disagreement here. One critique could be that the volume does skew heavily to a focus on the Americas, with the pieces on Iran, Palestine and South Africa being shorter 'interventions' in contrast to the longer 'features' on the US and Latin America. I am hesitant to even make this critique, however: in my experience it is all too common for feminist and critical researchers to be expected to include every conceivable issue in a way that is rarely expected of others. Edited collections can only ever offer a partial insight into research on a given theme. They are shaped by factors beyond editors deliberate or inadvertent exclusions ranging from who happened to see the call for papers in time to authors' competing commitments. While we should all be attentive to ensuring inclusion across every stage of curating an edited collection – disseminating calls across a variety of institutional and non-institutional channels; timelines that account for workloads, precarity, care work, disability and illness; actively seeking out contributions from those who are missing and underrepresented – it is unfair to expect an edited volume to be all things to all people. The contributors are to be commended for their thoughtful, deliberate inclusion of as many topics, historical periods, and geographical locations as they could.

This rich edited collection will be useful for teaching and research across a range of disciplines, including Gender Studies, Latin American Studies, African American Studies, History, English, Sociology, and Political Science, to name just a few. The collection also left me feeling hopeful – a rare feat for academic scholarship in dark times.

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