

Celebrating feminist responses to populist politics

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When I began teaching feminist and sexuality studies in Germany many years ago, I needed to learn about the variety of feminist movements that in no way resembled the second-wave in US America, in which I had been acculturated. Part of this learning consisted in recognising that the wave metaphor, used so typically to characterise the history of feminist movements in the UK and the US, fits the history of other feminist movements only poorly. This is true for Germany, before and after reunification in 1989, for the Northern European countries, and for those geopolitical contexts about whose feminisms I knew far less. This includes South European and post-Yugoslavian articulations of feminisms, such as those in Croatia and elsewhere. My personal education of engaging with feminisms different from ones in my country of origin may mirror the reader's experience of this issue, which highlights feminisms in South European contexts.

The voices that have been assembled in this issue speak primarily from the perspective of South Europe. These voices articulate themselves at a particular moment of time – when minoritized communities are feeling the conjoined forces of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a surge of anti-feminist and anti-queer and anti-trans initiatives within Europe and beyond, and while the Mediterranean remains a grave for migrant persons. “Feminist responses to populist politics” then invites Anglophone readers to enter into forms of feminist resistance taking place in Mediterranean countries, as activists react to the pandemic and a variety of nationalist and ethno-nationalist initiatives that have chosen feminists and queer and trans persons as their preferred enemies.

The essays gathered here reflect on feminist-activist work in Catalunya, in Spain, in Italy, and in Croatia, and the dissemination of feminist topoi in these geopolitical areas, and globally. The authors are activists, and the guest editors and the contributors readily dispel with some common misrepresentations of feminists today. One concerns feminism's supposed exclusions of intersectional and anti-racist viewpoints, and of trans women and non-binary persons. Each of the essays that appears in this issue speaks for inclusionary feminisms. One also champions a form of “resilient feminism,” meant here not in the sense of a neo-liberal *Lean-In* brand of feminism that insists that individual women just need to adapt and try harder, but rather understood as a form of continuous and adaptive response to new iterations

of neo-liberal power. In their composition, with one more mature and two younger feminist scholars, the guest editors also unite in dissipating the narrative of a generational divide amongst feminist women.

Some of the most compelling topoi that emerge in this issue are the wealth of concerted activist activities taking on structural issues, such as incursions into women's reproductive rights in anti-abortion initiatives and anti-trans positions. These efforts include a conscious resistance to a cooption of feminist tropes by nationalist movements and ethno-nationalist political parties. The co-option of feminist ideals has been previously thematised by Nancy Fraser, in economic contexts, by Sara Farris in nationalist ones, and by Gabriele Dietze in ethnonationalist projects. "Transfeminism" is postulated as a counter position to the supposed defense of vulnerable women and children, and to the re-gendering encouraged by right-wing nationalists, as is an inclusive use of "womxn." Another is the utilization of a globally recognizable Visual Grammar of symbols of resistance that has emerged out of paratextual adaptations of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985).

Originally a Canadian novelist's response to the conservatism of the Reagan-era United States, the dystopian world of *The Handmaid's Tale* describes a post-war totalitarian patriarchy in which the few remaining fertile women are enslaved and ritualistically raped in order to provide children for Gilead's leader. This fictional storyworld has developed into an extra-textual universe of symbols, phrases, and sayings, based particularly on the aesthetics of the Hulu television series adaptation (2017—present). *The Handmaid's Tale* provides source material for an infinite number of protests, memes, and sayings that oppose the repression of women. The appearance of handmaids at protests around the world – that is, red-cloaked women, wearing white bonnets – is redeployed then from being a token of surveillance and misogynistic control to a symbol of embodied resistance against encroachments on women's bodily integrity. It is here that the South European context of this issue becomes linked to the essay on *The Handmaid's Tale* as a global franchise, a touchstone for feminist and allied forms of resistance in our post-digital world.