

## Voices from the classroom

**A collaborative review of: Pamela Moss (Editor), Karen Falconer Al-Hindi (eds.), *Feminisms in Geography: Rethinking Space, Place, and Knowledges*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007. 270 pp.**

**Reviewed by: Anu Sabhlok, Angela Richardson, Jamee Blocher, Patrick Webb, Melissa Cottrell, Meghan Dunn, Stephanie Netherton, Chase Medved, Sarah Howard**

*Feminisms in Geography: Rethinking Space, Place and Knowledges* offers an excellent introduction to feminist geography while incorporating its uncertainties, debates and struggles. True to its feminist objectives, this book is very much a collaborative venture in which multiple voices claim their space in multiple ways. In the spirit of this book, this review too is a collaborative project involving students from my Gender and Geography class at the University of Louisville. *Feminisms in Geography* was one of the textbooks for this upper level class and at the end of the semester, the students teamed up into groups of two to write their final collaborative exam -which was a review of the readings. As I was getting ready for the Author Meets Critic session at the AAG, the students provided their perspectives on the book. Many of these discussions, material from the collaborative exam, and follow-up conversations have been included in this book review.

*Feminisms in Geography* reflects the growth of feminist geography as a discipline with diverse and multiple perspectives. It is also timely that it brings to the fore the dangers or the contradictions that emerge as feminist geography moves from the margins to the mainstream. The editors provide a well balanced selection of articles that are significant to the history and geography of feminist research within geography and also encompass the range from established scholars to emerging voices. I also liked that between the acknowledgements and the introduction the editors make explicit their methodology for choosing how, what and who gets to claim space in their 'anti-anthology'.

*Feminisms in Geography* performs another balancing act and that is between the individual narrative and the collective dialogue—the space where the I changes to the we. It is often easy to lose out on the individual voice to gain the strength of a collective. However in *Feminisms in Geography* the editors and the authors are

careful not to lose out on the individual voice while charting the terrain between I and we. Because of the wide spectrum of feminist geographic scholarship that this book presents, I chose to use it as a textbook in my gender and geography class this spring. In order to further extend this collaborative project and multiple voices heard in this book I present this critique in that spirit of collective scholarship—along with my students from the gender and geography class.

We preface this critique by acknowledging and thanking the editors and authors that have invited us to participate in the debates within feminist geography and recognized us not AS mere consumers of a textbook but agents in an emerging discipline. We felt that this book allowed us to engage in a conversation We feel that not only does the book present a diversity of feminist geographic thought in its authors but that it also enables and engages a diversity in audience—in terms of student, scholar, activist and so on. One of the books objectives is to challenge the hegemony of the English language. The presence of non-English chapters generated conflicting viewpoints within the class:

Melissa and Meghan: The non-English languages used in this book alienate the reader by making sections of the book that are inaccessible. Though the intention is probably not to make the reader confused, I felt like we were missing information. Trying to read the coded text showed us that we were disadvantaged.

Jamie and Patrick: Since the book is about changing ideas of space and place it is important to remember that everything will not be tailored to the reader or be within a certain comfort zone. It demonstrates that the reader may feel out of place because it is not in their native language.

Angela and Stephanie: The use of articles from other languages emphasizes that other cultures are affected by the same issues as Western feminists and geographers. It helps form a bond.

Sarah and Chase: It is interesting that as a text published and marketed in the United States, the editors chose not to include anything written in Spanish. Ultimately, we appreciate the fresh perspective that these pieces allowed, although it would have been helpful to include English translations of these pieces.

As a class, we also felt that while this book challenges the English language hegemony it privileges the written word over other forms of expression. The project

may be moved further by incorporating other forms of knowledge production and presentation by somehow incorporating the visual and performing arts into the format.

Another aspect of the anti-anthology that generated immense discussion was the presence of an alternative table of contents:

Melissa and Meghan: While we understand the intentions of the editors in making this contribution (organizing alternative ways to read the book) we do not feel it is conducive to the needs of a university class. Students read what is assigned to them in their textbooks. The professor provides the chapters to be read in preparation for the next class. Unless a professor structures their class according to one of these tables of contents they are of little use to the students. In fact the inclusion of these tables of contents could be quite confusing.

Sarah and Chase: In keeping with the theme of differing perspectives, the editors offer two 'alternative' tables of contents in addition to the primary table. These additional tables serve as a reminder that, just like the field of feminist geography, this collection can be experienced in many different ways. Even if the reader has already read the book in one particular order, these tables still offer a valuable way of revising and enhancing the experience. It is particularly helpful that the editors explained their choice for the organization of each table.

Angela and Stephanie: Feminism is a concept that seeks inclusion Therefore the two tables of contents include different approaches to analyzing feminist geography.

Anu: As an instructor I would like to add that, while we read a lot of chapters from the *Feminisms in Geography* book, there were numerous additional readings as well. Therefore the students did not get an adequate chance to engage with the table of contents in the book. I think, each person finds resonance in structuring their reading in a different way and the alternative table of contents is an important reminder of that difference.

In terms of the contents of the anti-anthology, the short four and a half page description of Amy Trauger's personal and intellectual journey to and within geography was considered most accessible, and therefore interesting, by the undergraduate students. However, as a class, we all found the book introduction and

the introductions to the sections of the book extremely good material for generating class discussions. The editor's introductions do a great job of tying the diverse pieces together. As an instructor, I found valuable the inclusion of articles dealing with other forms of difference (other than gender) to be a particularly helpful tool in dismantling mainstream ideas about feminism. A particularly useful aspect of *Feminisms in Geography* as a textbook was the fact that it contained some of the critical (historical) pieces of the discipline but alongside these were pieces that discussed feminist geography as current praxis:

Jamie and Patrick: This book engages the reader to examine not just the subject matter but also how the subject matter is investigated.

In the end, we appreciated the analogy of the rhizome and we see this book as being both a node for feminist geographic teaching and learning and one that sends out shoots and roots allowing other nodes to form and coexist.

---

Anu Sabhlok, *et al* "Voices from the classroom . A collaborative review of: Pamela Moss (Editor), Karen Falconer Al-Hindi (eds.), *Feminisms in Geography: Rethinking Space, Place, and Knowledges*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007. 270 pp." *thirdspace* x/y (March 2010)