

# Editor's Introduction: Passing the Baton in Precarious Times and The Available Means of Transnational Feminist Rhetorical Studies

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Clancy and I took on the position of co-editors of *Peitho* amidst the COVID-19 global pandemic in 2021. At the time, *Peitho*, like many journals, was struggling with fewer submissions and a scant number of reviewers who had the capacity to spend the extra uncompensated time reading and commenting on their colleagues' work. I think it is safe to say that *everyone* was tired and anxious. I am grateful for the vast team that made *Peitho* much like the cover of our first issue in Fall 2021, rise and become brighter despite dark times. Since Clancy and I have stewarded the *Peitho* ship, we have been grateful to work with and learn from several stellar editors and web coordinators: Temptaous Mckoy, Stacy Earp, Kelli Lycke, Ashley Canter Meredith, Stacie Klinowski, Jennifer Nish, Hannah Taylor, Jade Onn, and Rachel Smith Olson. We are both grateful also for the guidance of our editorial board who did the groundwork to index the journal and include it in the EBSCO database as well as to move the journal under WAC Clearinghouse. Michael Palmquist made the process go easy and smoothly! Tarez Graban, the Chair of the Editorial Board, was the most responsive and proactive Chair we could have asked for. We have confidence that the new editorial team will make sure *Peitho* continues to thrive and grow.

Although Clancy and I didn't apply as a team to be co-editors of *Peitho* (we had never even met!), we are grateful that the search committee brought us together. Collaboration enabled us to stay on schedule with publishing issues and deal with the challenges presented by the pandemic. We are proud to have helped with infrastructural changes, like indexing *Peitho* in the WAC Clearinghouse databases and getting an ISSN

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assigned to the journal as well as DOIs assigned to each article. We're pleased to have made some progressive changes to submission guidelines, like including image descriptions in the captions under images (including cover images of issues), which is preferable to alt-text from an accessibility standpoint. Also, we adopted a Creative Commons license for *Peitho*, which copyright and open access scholars nickname "CC-BY," or attribution only. That means the authors retain the copyright to their work, but they grant *Peitho* the right to publish it (and it cannot be de-published). Other people are free to make copies of articles, distribute them, and to create derivative works such as audio recordings, as long as they give credit to the author. We have sometimes received inquiries about republishing a *Peitho* article in an edited collection, and our Creative Commons license grants this permission in advance. And we're happy to now participate in the Best of the Journals in Rhetoric & Composition Series from Parlor Press, allowing us and future editorial teams to nominate two articles per volume year to be considered for selection in a future *Best of the Journals* collection.

I took on the co-editorship at *Peitho* because I believed that *Peitho* was poised to address the deep cultural tensions that exist within the US and the complex transglobal relations that make feminist work necessary. At the time, in the US, we were (and still are) experiencing blatant and deadly racism at the hands of those in power, which had fueled activist commitments and social justice movements like Black Lives Matter and MeToo. Yet, in broadening outside of the US, we were emerging from a global pandemic that had laid bare the deep racial, gendered, and geopolitical inequalities that were more hidden/not at the public forefront before March of 2020. Beyond the pandemic, we were seeing the continued punishment and inhuman treatment of migrants as they sought to escape prosecution—Muslims in China, children at the US-Mexico border, Yemini and Syrians scattered throughout the Middle East and Europe (and other places), to name a few. Likewise, scholars and activist were actively naming the structures of white supremacy and imperialism that imbue all aspects of US and global culture. Following scholars such a Darrel Wanzer- Serrano, Lisa Flores, Lisa B. Y. Calvente, Bernadette Marie Calafell, and Karma R. Chávez, as an editor I sought to poise the journal so that it could begin to examine critically the field of feminist rhetorical studies' theoretical underpinnings, commitments, methods, and practices to account for its own raced, gendered, and ethnocentric focus. As an editor, in addition to displaying new work in already established areas, I wanted to draw the *Peitho* readership's attention to new approaches in the field that address these sorts of structures of power. Thus, one of the main goals I had was to expand the journal away from its US-centric focus and methods. Part of doing this, I knew meant developing editorial practices that were obviously inclusive, anti-racist, and open to publishing perspectives and scholarship from outside of the US. In fact, having the journal indexed, I knew, would help authors from outside of the US to be able to point to the necessary metrics needed in their countries so that our journal would count toward promotions. But it also meant seeking out and publishing essays that offered new methods, perspectives, and writing styles than our field may have come to expect.

I curated this issue, my final issue as an editor of *Peitho*, to tangibly demonstrate the culmination of these goals through drawing the readerships' attention to the co-workings of critical race and transnational feminist theory--two areas of scholarship that are poised to address our recent and current political moment.

Several of the essays in this issue were proposed to Peitho by Aja Martinez. As she edited her own special issue on Critical Race Theory, she noted a cluster of essays with a transnational feminist bent. Martinez added that germinal transnational feminist scholar, Chandra Mohanty, was willing to contribute a forward to the essays. I excitedly suggested that the authors submit their manuscripts for review and decided to build my final issue around these essays, adding a few more essays that were also addressing race and transnational feminism. A special thanks is due to Aja Martinez, who worked with these authors in the earlier stages of their projects.

That was almost two years ago. The COVID pandemic was waning, people had energy and things to say. To say the least, the political climate was different from what it is today. Most of these essays were written well in advance of or on the heels of the October 7, 2023 reinvigoration of the violence between Palestinians and Israelis. Pro-Palestinian students had not yet been arrested; Donald Trump had not been re-elected; freedom of speech still had protections; the US government wasn't actively attacking its own citizens.

Peitho is an open access journal. As a scholar, especially one who has sought to share scholarship with and learn from and alongside my international colleagues, I am dedicated to open access scholarship. Yet, in the past six months, the political climate has shifted so much so that scholars fear retaliation for their speech acts, especially international scholars who write and reside in the US. In the last few months, there have been several high-profile arrests of international scholars. The abduction of the Tufts student, Rümeyza Ozturk, by ICE agents is an especially chilling example. Videos show her walking in broad daylight home to her apartment in an urban area of Boston when a swarm of black clad people with faces covered by masks, swooped in, grabbed her, and forced her into an unmarked car. Ozturk was sent out of the region to Louisiana where she was held in an ICE detention facility for over six weeks. Although Ozturk was accused of supporting Hamas, which the federal government has deemed a terrorist group there is no evidence that Ozturk has supported Hamas. Ozturk co-wrote an op-ed in the Tuft's student newspaper in support of Palestinians but in that article did not claim support for Hamas. While the thin reasons for her arrest are alarming enough, the fact that a woman of color just walking down the street can be taken... kidnapped... and put into a car is terrifying. That people can be removed from their community without due process is a sign of fascism.

It is because of cases like this and the unfolding political climate that is threatening democracy, freedom of speech and movement, and that is actively encouraging violence against immigrants, that scholars have become afraid of speaking out—even US citizens. At my own institution, my administration suggested that *all* faculty “assess their risks and tolerances for being detained” when crossing back into the US after international travel for work. Another dear friend and colleague was terribly doxxed recently due to her political views spoken at her university's graduation. In fact, this issue was supposed to be bigger, to include more voices, but some scholars pulled out of the issue for fear of retaliation.

What we are seeing is an expansion of organized and systematic nation-state violence against non-cit-

izen populations in an attempt to consolidate the authority of the nation-state by displaying its ability to incarcerate, deport, or otherwise dispose of so called non-desired, non-citizens. Feminist and critical race scholar, Grace Hong has used the term “existentially surplus,” to describe groups of people who have become rhetorically coded as criminal through narratives, tropes, and metaphors. Such narratives that code surplus populations aid in brewing disdain for and disregard of the humanity of entire groups (Hong 72-73). Several feminist rhetorical scholars have been tracing the slow rhetorical moves to create “existentially surplus” populations (see Ore, Wingard, and Flores, to name just a few) and now we are seeing the extreme material effects of such long-standing narratives in the form of abducting immigrants off the street and even in courts at asylum and immigration hearings.

As Mohanty’s statement that frames this issue asks,

“At a time in history when we are faced with an authoritarian, misogynist, racist, imperial regime that has actively dismantled higher education in the USA, what does it mean to stand as an academic witness against the consolidation of white supremacy, of imperial regimes, of the normalization of gender, race, caste and class violence, of religious fundamentalisms and climate disasters, economic dispossession and the carceral state within and beyond the walls of the academy?”

Mohanty’s questions is extremely important for feminist rhetorical scholars because not only do we have the tools to witness and practice rhetorical listening, but we also have the ability to rhetorically analyze and connect rhetorical acts to materials realities. What transnational feminist rhetorical scholars can add is an attention to how what is happening in the US is in no way isolated from the histories of fascism globally or disconnected to other unfolding forms of violence in other parts of the world including Gaza.

Much like in Mohanty’s earlier work, the essay in this issue demonstrate how we can be attentive to local, situated, and embodied rhetorics of everyday life at the same time as scholars and teachers “consider the local in/of the global and vice versa” (“Under Western Eyes Revisited”). Mohanty’s call for an analysis of local and transnational power as it intersects with gender, race, class, caste, and other social categories was taken up by a first generation of transnational feminists rhetorical scholars almost two decades ago (see Schell, Hesford, Dingo, Reidner, Wingard, Richards, Queen, among others). An analysis of scaled, multifaceted power, these early transnational feminist rhetorical scholars argue, is central to how rhetoric circulates and is persuasive, for understanding argument, audience, and situations, for analyzing how narratives, tropes, and metaphors circulate and are persuasive, and how rhetorics are lived and embodied in everyday life (see Dingo, Hesford, Nish, Riedner, Wingard, Schell, and Wang).

Essays in this issue of *Peitho*, which represent a new generation of transnational feminist rhetorical scholars, are grounded in analysis of networked power where rhetorical acts take place within a complex interaction between race, gender, political economic, national, and geopolitical power and contexts that intersect with what rhetors say, how audiences hear messages, and whose rhetorical acts circulate (Dingo, Dingo and Riedner). Accordingly essays in this issue track, unpack, and make visible local and lived experiences, embodied lives, speech acts, and rhetorical practices that are impacted and integrated in networked systems

of power and intersect with gender, race, and other social categories. The scholars in this issue extend this geminal work to argue for discussions of how power works rhetorically that, importantly, includes complex analysis of different scales of power. While earlier transnational feminist work tended to take more of a birds-eye view of these scales, the authors in this issue, settle deeply into the lived and embodied everyday life with an eye to the global. As their work makes so clear, looking at the local and the global, regional, national together requires analytical breadth *and* depth in order to capture specificity of local contexts in which “multiple forces—among them economic agendas, social practices, historical legacies...reinforce each other in complex situations” (Riedner 649). Beyond analysis of power itself, as this group of scholars points out, is an effort to make visible lived and embodied experiences within networked power. As a whole the authors investigate how people experience and live in local situations that are imbricated in networked power that intersects with formations of gender and race. The purpose is to make these experiences visible as a means of activism and intervention, a practice that feminist rhetorical scholars, Sweta Baniya urges. Readers see the network from a particular time and place (Jimenez), reading from the local outwards and taking into account the specificity of lives and powerful contexts in which particular people live.

For example, in Florianne Bo Jimenez essay “Speculative Linking in the Network: Rethinking Comparison in Transnational Feminist Rhetoric” makes the keen observation that “Methodologically, this makes the intellectual and ethical task of the transnational rhetorical scholar complex: to be a transnational rhetorical scholar is to know multiple places, spaces, and people *well enough* to describe links between them. The responsibility of the transnational rhetorical scholar, then, is conceptual breadth.” Jimenez goes on to consider what transnational feminist scholars might be losing when their conceptual breadth is dependent upon one’s own specific context. To combat this potential for a myopic point of view, she proposes a method of “speculative linking: a transnational method for analyzing multiple texts via a generous and ethical mode of comparison.” She tests this new method by placing two different, yet networked texts in conversation with each other—a popular press how to book about balancing domestic labor and the Zine WORK IS WORK which is written by domestic workers in Hong Kong. Through this essay, she demonstrates new methods and theoretical frames that speak across difference but still recognize vectors of difference within transnational economies.

Nabila Hijazi’s essay “Syrian Refugee Women Producing Counter-stories: Countering Female Fragility,” also seeks to work across difference. She investigates stereotypes of Syrian women in media representations and other cultural texts contrasting the richness and complexity of their lives and offers a pedagogical approach for students to think and act across difference. In her classroom, she asks students to consider what narratives do. In doing so Hijazi moves her students through analyzes of discursive power, showing them how systemic inequalities, as she says, require an intersectional analysis where gender, race are situated in geopolitical contexts. This analysis is important for students, as she argues, because they learn to “...challenge the paternalistic frameworks that frame these women solely as victims in need of rescue by Western institutions.” Hijazi’s essay revolves around the experiences of Syrian refugee women “facing particular forms of discrimination and marginalization” in order to interrogate the ways in which “intersecting forms of oppres-

sion impact their lives.” Through an innovative pedagogical practice whereby students interview and work with Syrian refugees, they learn to situate these women’s lives “within the broader framework of global power dynamics, migration, and cultural politics,” deploying a critical and intersectional approach “that recognizes the agency of Muslim refugee women, challenges reductive stereotypes, and addresses the structural inequalities that shape their lives.”

In the poem “My Queer (Writing) Heart,” Saurabh Anad moves from microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem that all inform each other - makes the relationship between the self and powerful systems visible in poem and narrative. The poetry and prologue invite readers to rethink access and support for queer writers in the context of institutional structures, showing how to “access to LGBT resources should not necessarily always be embedded in institutional through institutional structures (confusing repetition of “institutional”) so that they are always at the whim of the institution. Such resources need to be decentralized, if required, to continue serving queer individuals in the community and not centralized within the institution to avoid defunding/underfunding the existence of such resources.” Just as Anad considers the relationship between identities and systems, Abantika Dhar and Ridita Mizan’s essay “Transnational Counterstories: Autoethnographies of Bangladeshi Women in US Higher Education” presents their own lived experiences as a standpoint from which they raise questions about existing power relations and inequality that turn on ethnic, national, and class differences. Reflecting on the anxiety of being NNES and teaching English to undergraduates in the Midwest, their accounts bear witness to experiences that result from different accents in the classroom. They reframe those experiences through transnational rhetorical feminist theory, as a “reflection of the inauthenticity imposed by these internalized norms.”

Majed Dweik and Yunis Vara’s essay “To Gather Amongst the Olive Trees: Counterstorytelling through Palestinian Feminist Survivance Rhetorics” weave between their grounded experiences of being part of the Palestinian diaspora living within the US while their extended family and friends live within occupied Gaza and the West Bank and the “infinite temporalities” that can disrupt Western understanding Palestinian narratives. Beautifully written and emotionally charged, the essay looks at narrative’s role in an ongoing genocide. They ask, “How do rhetorical studies offer particularly crucial tools to address the immediacy of ongoing, accelerated violence and genocide?” To answer this question, they offer and embody Palestinian feminist survivance tactics as a rhetorical tool to recognize how survival and resistance go hand in hand under settler colonialism. This essay challenges feminist scholars to sit simultaneously with theory and emotion coming not to conclusion but to experience the pain of genocide through the eyes and words of those who are surviving it.

Ultimately, the objective of these essays is an investment in solidarity practices. In different ways, these scholars ask: how can we build new solidarities through pedagogies, listening, reflecting, storytelling, and analyses? One means of building solidarities across boundaries is through classroom teaching that takes into consideration lived experiences by teaching rhetorical listening, storytelling, and writing counter stories that account for networked power. Along these lines, Hijazi uses a transnational feminist framework to make

visible how refugees are portrayed, but also how these hegemonic portrayals can be written. In her focus on counter-stories, that “opposes language of hegemony and oppression” Hijazi finds ways to unpack experiences and amplify voices that provide an alternative portrait. She brings this work to the classroom, working carefully with students to conduct interviews that encourage open dialogue, that encourages rhetorical listening (Ratcliffe), and that engages deeply with cultural, political, and historical contexts that shape women’s experiences and voices. Similarly, Dhar and Mizan advocate for a resistant transnational feminist rhetorical practice through “transnational counterstories,” wherein these counterstories serve a “rhetorical method to share our narratives based on our academic and language experiences of struggle and non-linear trajectories of knowledge-making from the perspective of transnational female graduate students in US higher education.” This focus on the complex precarity of international gendered graduate students sheds light on their often hidden and neglected experiences, and well expands dialogue on pedagogy.

Lastly, the essays are framed by transnational feminist rhetorical scholars, Belinda Walzer, Tareza Samra Graban, Jennifer Nish, and Sweta Baniya who offer forwarding thinking and expansive response to these essays. This collaboratively written response raises questions about transnational feminist rhetorical studies critical frameworks while highlighting how as a method and practice it can create solidarities and justice despite colonial, imperial, and neoliberal legacies. Ultimately, essays in this issue reinforce the necessity of recognizing and analyzing power for exploring how social actors speak and act, and for looking deeply at how identities are formed and developed. Power - in all its forms and in intersecting scales - must be contended with as the context for recognizing and building voice and agency. This analysis holds together intersectional analysis of race, class, caste, ethnicity, religion, nationality, and other axes of social differentiation. The essays demonstrate a deep investment in bringing to the surface situated voices as they highlight how and where speakers act, speak, and write from deeply particular contexts. They gesture to the rhetorical strategies such as counter-storytelling that can be employed to deeply understand local lived gendered and racialized experiences and by tracking how rhetoric is activated by actors and collectivities. Thus, the essays respond to Mohanty’s call for attention to embodied rhetorics of everyday life within the context of deep and complex analysis of power.

In close, I leave this co-editorship with a slight sense of hope that scholars such as those included in this issue will help us navigate the precarious terrain of our current turbulent times. I also present this issue as an opening and call for us as feminist to grow our methods and to maintain our solidarities even as we will most certainly be challenged.

**In solidarity,**

Rebecca

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