

Reflections on Activist Scholarship in the Trump-Bolsonaro Era: Dual Hemisphere Hate Transforms Intellectual Praxis into Political Imperative*

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*Reflexiones sobre el activismo académico en la era Trump-
Bolsonaro: el odio en los dos hemisferios transforma la práctica
intelectual en un imperativo político*

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Abstract *Resumen*

In this paper we reflect on the importance of activist scholarship given the frightening global shift to the right, focusing our discussion on Brazil and the U.S. We start by explaining our points of departure as they shape our individual and shared analysis. Next, we recap our first activist scholarship project, the book *Taking Risks: Feminist Activism and Research in the Americas*, and the definition of activist scholarship used throughout it and thus in this paper. Next, we further expand on the circumstances in the U.S. under Trump and Brazil under Bolsonaro which lead us to claim that this period brings a new urgency to feminist activist scholarship. We close by looking toward a future where the electorates in the northern and southern hemispheres have voted out both Trump and Bolsonaro and activist scholarship is once again a tool of pro-action not reaction and survival.

KEYWORDS:

Bolsonaro, Feminism, Resistance, Trump, Urgency, Activist Scholarship

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En este artículo se reflexiona sobre la importancia del activismo académico, dado el inquietante cambio global hacia la derecha, enfocando la discusión en Brasil y Estados Unidos. Al inicio se explican los puntos de partida, pues estos moldean el análisis individual y compartido. Luego, se retoma nuestro primer proyecto de activismo académico, el libro *Taking Risks: Feminist Activism and Research in the Americas*, y la definición de activismo académico usada a lo largo del mismo y, por lo tanto, en este artículo. Después, se amplía la información sobre las circunstancias en Estados Unidos bajo el mandato de Trump, y en Brasil con Bolsonaro, lo que permite afirmar que este periodo conlleva una nueva urgencia para el activismo académico feminista. Para terminar, se divisa un futuro donde los electores en los hemisferios norte y sur hayan expulsado a Trump y a Bolsonaro, y el activismo académico sea una vez más una herramienta de pro-acción, no de reacción y supervivencia.

PALABRAS CLAVE:

Bolsonaro, feminismo, resistencia, Trump, urgencia, activismo académico

Introduction

Jessica and Julie met in 2010. Jessica was a student in Julie’s co-taught, first year class, “Place and Displacement in the Americas.” The class touches on a lot of topics, but a major focus is Latinx communities in the States. In order to understand that, we need to understand U.S. foreign and economic policies and thus wars in Central and South America and free trade in Mexico to understand the U.S. role in creating the immigrants and refugees to whom we subsequently deny safe passage. One day, Jessica raised her hand from her seat in the very back of the class and said something to the effect “are we going to spend this whole class talking about how bad the U.S. is?” By that point in her career Julie had been teaching Latin American history, thus U.S. foreign policy for almost fifteen years, so that was not the first time she had heard that question. She knew Jessica was Brazilian so was confident she was not personally offended by her interpretation of history, but she remembers being a little puzzled by the question. Jessica also still remembers that day eight and half years ago. It makes us both chuckle, for Julie, mostly because Jessica so boldly spoke her mind. Julie was relieved she agreed with her analysis and chose to take four more classes and one directed study with her before she graduated with her BA in global studies. Toward the end of Jessica’s studies at UWB, Julie was finishing her edited collection *Taking Risks: Feminist Activism and Research in the Americas* (Shayne, 2014). An external reviewer suggested Julie include introductions to the three different sections of the book. Julie loved the idea but had no time to write them, so she immediately thought of Jessica, found her some money, and asked if she was interested. Jessica jumped at what was for her a very exciting opportunity and for Julie, a tremendous help. Yes, it was awesome to support an undergraduate student but that was more of a bonus. Here we are four-plus years later and this collaboration is far more intentional and less hasty. Yet, there is a new urgency to it; the urgency caused by Bolsonaro and Trump¹.

Bolsonaro reminds us that animosity toward leftist scholarship and educators is always a top priority for neo-dictators, even those who rule a country without the military doing their dirty work while Trump has elevated feminist activist scholarship to a whole new level of importance when thinking about teaching and researching in the U.S. during an era of visible, unapologetic, institutionalized misogyny. Simply put: feminist activist scholarship is needed more now than it was in 2014 when *Taking Risks* was first published, given the ultra-right turn in the Americas. When Julie started the

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1. We intentionally leave out “President” because we choose not to dignify their undignified behaviors with a title that in our minds presumes maturity, seriousness, and acting toward a collective good; characteristics that are woefully lacking from each man’s presidency.

book in approximately 2010, it was part of a larger feminist scholar-activist agenda of continuing to fill the archives with Latinx women’s activist histories; curricular archives in which Latinx women are conspicuously underrepresented. Latin American feminist studies is fully entrenched with new publications coming out regularly - films, journal articles, monographs, edited collections, magazines, novels, etc. But even with these interdisciplinary, transnational, and institutionalized advances, the archives will never be able to catch up with the activist and history makers who have yet to be documented. In other words, the documentation part of the agenda, *archiving as activism*, will never be obsolete because it can never be completed. That said, given this ultra-right turn, especially in Brazil and the U.S., we are experiencing a whole new level of urgency to the feminist activist scholarship agenda.

In this paper we reflect on the importance of activist scholarship and *Taking Risks* given this frightening global shift to the right. We will focus our discussion on Brazil and the U.S., though sadly, as readers of this journal know, these two nations are far from the only two spinning hard right². Readers also likely know that while the viciousness and efficacy of the present right-wing climate are especially visible, this era did not begin with the election of Trump and Bolsonaro. We start by explaining our points of departure as they shape our individual and shared analysis. Next, we recap *Taking Risks* and the definition of activist scholarship used throughout it and thus in this paper. Next, we further expand on the circumstances in the U.S. under Trump and Brazil under Bolsonaro which lead us to claim that this period brings a new urgency to feminist activist scholarship³. We close by looking toward a future where the electorates in the northern and southern hemispheres have voted out both Trump and Bolsonaro and activist scholarship is once again a tool of pro-action not reaction and survival.

Our points of departure

Julie is presently a Senior Lecturer, just approved for promotion to Principal Lecturer, and Faculty Coordinator of Gender, Women & Sexuality Studies (GWSS) at the University of Washington Bothell. (As of this writing, GWSS has formally existed for nearly three academic years.) As faculty on the lecturer track, her primary commitments are to teaching and service. She is expected to remain “scholarly engaged”

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2. For a new analysis of the global relationship between the hard right turn and misogyny, see Beinart (2019).

3. We chose to organize the discussion chronologically, thus we start with the election of Trump though we had originally intended to start with Brazil by way of decentering the U.S.

but with significantly less pressure to publish and with less restrictions about where and how than her tenure line colleagues; for example, this paper. This all matters because Julie feels more real-world pressure to grow the GWSS degree knowing the misogyny that enabled Trump is also being fully institutionalized by him; thus, we need GWSS-trained experts in all circles to combat the damage he is creating, even if he is a one-term president. Similarly, in the classroom, Julie feels the need to be extra vigilant in her use of airtight logic and reasoning, being mindful that trolls are more inclined to search out her and her colleague's classrooms with the simple goal of undermining our credibility and authority knowing they literally have the president of the U.S. on their side. In other words, growing a GWSS degree and teaching GWSS classes no longer feels like a completely safe and physically risk-free job.

Jessica is U.S. based, Brazilian national and future MPA/M.Ed. grad student (still deciding and choosing programs). She currently works at Everett Community College as a program specialist within the Workforce Funding Department, providing non-traditional students funding to pursue higher education. Jessica cannot untangle her activism (whether scholarly or otherwise) from her identity, because as a lesbian, woman of color, and an immigrant, fighting Trump's and Bolsonaro's administrations are a means of survival, not just for herself but also her communities. For Jessica - this is not just scholarly activism, but a tool used as a means for survival. She closely identifies with the sentiment in a quote used widely during the pre-2019 election Bolsonaro's #EleNão (#NotHim) protests, "Se fere minha existência, serei resistência" (If it threatens my own existence, I'll be the resistance).

On *Taking Risks* and activist scholarship

Julie refers to *Taking Risks: Feminist Activism and Research in the Americas* as her passion project (Shayne, 2014: xvii), a project she was explicitly discouraged from pursuing while an assistant professor at her former institution. The more she talks to folks about the book, teaches it, and thinks about next projects, she becomes that much more convinced of the fittingness of the descriptor. *Taking Risks* is an interdisciplinary collection; the contributors represent about eighteen different disciplines and interdisciplines when combining the contributors' degrees earned and departments in which we teach. The essays are about activism in the Americas, mostly feminist but not entirely, and the scholarly risks taken to do the research needed to write this sort of book. We theoretically situate the book in well-established discussions of activist scholarship and its many incarnations and transnational feminist theory. We articulate the activists in the book as storytellers, and borrowing from

Gramsci, identify them as “organic intellectuals” and marginalized experts. Julie sees the collection and dissemination of the activists’ stories as a form of archiving, especially with respect to college curriculum archives.

Taking Risks starts with a foreword by Margaret Randall, who Julie read voraciously as an undergraduate women’s studies student at San Francisco State University; indeed, Margaret was Julie’s first inspiration to keep activism and scholarship inseparable. There is also a very brief but powerful description of a memorial that stands in Argentina commemorating a massacre that happened in 1955. Nora Patrich, the artist who made the memorial, is an Argentine woman who was exiled during the dictatorship there and went to Vancouver BC; she also painted the mural which became the cover of the book.

The first section of the book looks at texts and activism. (Jessica wrote the introduction to this section.) There is an essay by Carmen Rodríguez, an exiled Chilean writer, poet, and activist that Julie met through her research on her last book about Chilean exiles and the solidarity movement, called *They Used to Call Us Witches: Chilean Exiles, Culture, and Feminism* (Shayne, 2009). Carmen’s essay is about writing fiction and poetry as activism. Julie started the main part of *Taking Risks* with Carmen’s work to foreground the importance of the arts to both resistance and intellectual production. Next, there is a chapter by Mahala Lettvin about memory activism in Argentina as represented in fiction and memory projects. Next is a chapter by Julie about Chilean exile feminist projects in Vancouver BC in the 1980s and early 90s. The last chapter of the section is by Marisela Fleites-Lear, a Cuban national, about Cuban underground libraries and a literary movement there which are unintended consequences of the merging of the Cuban government’s literacy campaign and its censorship practices.

The next section of the book, the introduction also written by Jessica, looks at performance, largely construed, and activism. It starts with a chapter by Tamera Marko about her video archive project in Medellín, Colombia called “Medellín mi hogar/my home Medellín”, which is a video archive of thousands of hours of interviews with internally displaced Colombian women responsible for rebuilding Medellín in the wake of that nation’s decades of violence. Next is a chapter by Robin Garcia who looks at community media in Venezuela during Chavez’s tenure, drawing heavily on Diana Taylor’s (2003) theories of repertoire and archives to foreground the staying power and thus importance of these media projects. Finally, there is a chapter by Christina Marín, a practitioner and director of Theatre of the Oppressed, who has directed a series of plays about the Juárez murders as a means of drawing attention to a femicide that largely goes unchecked. The final section of the book is about grassroots activism. It starts with Erica William’s work about sex workers

organizing in Bahia, Brazil. And while we cannot say for sure, we can speculate with virtual certainty that the women Erica introduces readers to in her chapter are significantly more vulnerable now that Bolsonaro is president. Next, Roberta Villalón, an Argentine national, talks about her activist research working with Latina immigrant victims and survivors of domestic violence. Finally, Shelly Grabe assembled some oral histories of Nicaraguan rural feminist activists, drawing on their decades of activism. Julie closes the book with a personal essay about her decision to leave her tenure track job in hopes of finding a path that was more amenable to happiness and eventually activist scholarship.

Taking Risks is situated in conversations of social justice and activist scholarship. What did that mean to us at the time Julie was editing the book? Firstly, we want to note that we use the terms social justice and activist scholarship interchangeably. As Julie and Kristy Leissle (2014: xviii-xix), the introduction's co-author, explain:

The term “social justice scholarship” resonates with this collection’s explicit grounding in a commitment to social justice. By this, we mean justice in research, knowledge production, and pedagogy; most importantly, this includes a commitment to supporting the right of everyone to live a life absent of economic, political, social, and personal violence. For the contributors to *Taking Risks*, the “social justice” in social justice scholarship refers to the factors that motivate us to research, along with the desired outcome to which we see ourselves contributing.

In writing the introduction to the book, Kristy and Julie reviewed much of the theoretical literature about activist scholarship, among other types of scholarly conversations. As readers of this special issue likely know, it is a voluminous and rich body of work. Thinking about our institutional locations and positions (both with teaching track jobs in a very interdisciplinary school) the definition that captured our politics, our contributors’ research, and our professional locales comes from Julia Sudbury [Chinyere Oparah] and Margo Okazawa-Rey (2009: 3), the editors of the already canonical text *Activist Scholarship: Antiracism, Feminisms, and Social Change*. They define activist scholarship as “the production of knowledge and pedagogical practices through active engagements with, and in the service of, progressive social movements”. As Julie and Kristy (Shayne; Leissle, 2014: xix) explain in the introduction, they “prefer their definition because it speaks to the broadness of scholarship: knowledge production (i.e., research) and pedagogy”. That said, given that activist research is also a major part of *Taking Risks*’ project, they turn to Bickham-Mendez (2008) and Potts and Brown (2005). Again, from the introduction:

Bickham Mendez maintains that “[t]he aim of politically engaged research is to form an admittedly fragile and difficult coalition between ‘grassroots,’ ‘local,’ or ‘experiential’ knowledge and ‘theoretical,’ ‘data-driven,’ or ‘scholarly knowledge.’ Similarly, Potts and Brown maintain that “[b]eing an anti-oppressive researcher means that there is political purpose and action to your research work. ... Anti-oppressive research involves making explicit the political practices of creating knowledge. ... It is about paying attention to, and shifting, how power relations work in and through the processes of doing research” (Shayne; Leissle, 2014: xix).

In short, drawing on the vast tombs of scholarship that came before us, including the very influential work of Fals-Borda (1979; 1991) and Paulo Freire (1983), *Taking Risks* conceptualizes activist scholarship as politically engaged pedagogy and research that forms a coalition between grassroots or experiential knowledge with theoretical or scholarly knowledge.

What accounts for the urgency?

As we have explained, we believe that the hard-right turn in the Americas, specifically the U.S. and Brazil, makes activist scholarship and thus *Taking Risks* more relevant than we ever imagined. But why? What is it about this current moment that inspires such a sense of urgency? We tell this story chronologically. Julie starts in the U.S. with the election of Trump and then Jessica takes us south to Brazil.

The United States

Julie taught two classes in fall 2016 when Trump was elected president. One was “Place and Displacement in the Americas,” the aforementioned class Jessica took with Julie many years prior, and the other “History and Globalization.” (Jessica also took that class with Julie while enrolled at UWB.) On election night, once it was clear that Trump was the victor, Julie and her co-professor of Place and Displacement sent a message to the students saying class was canceled the next day. Her Globalization class, however, was a night class the next day so she had a day to sort of pull herself together and they had already missed one class that quarter so she couldn’t cancel another one. She showed up looking like she was going to a funeral and one of the students asked her if that was intentional. She told him yes; the sorrow she felt was heavy. That class had about forty-five students, most of whom showed up. Julie was shocked but many told her later they wanted to hear her take on the election. Like

many of her classes, white students were in the minority, it was evenly divided by gender, a lot of international students, a handful of Muslim women, a lot of Latinx students, at least one out lesbian; basically a room full of Trump targets. Julie read the following statement to the class:

Dear students,

Like many of you in this room I am heartbroken. I am furious. I am terrified. I am numb. The outcome of last night's election is the result of misogyny and racist xenophobia. It's also the result of a broken electoral system in which the popular vote was higher for Secretary Clinton than it was for the president elect.

The president elect was endorsed by the KKK. In my mind, that should have disqualified him but apparently it made him more appealing to some.

Almost every one of us in this room has been insulted or harassed by the president elect. Almost all of the communities represented in this room are now more vulnerable than we already were. His VP, the only one of the two of them who actually has some political experience, has spent a significant amount of his career regulating women and queer/trans bodies. Pence advanced some of the most hateful, insulting, and restrictive abortion laws in the country. He granted himself such authority over women's bodies that a Facebook campaign called "Periods for Pence" was started and women who had their periods would call his office and let him know the details since clearly he felt so entitled to be involved in our private health decisions. He also made it legal for people to not do business with gay people just because. He won't let transgender kids use the bathrooms of their identity. And he is firmly committed to undoing every LGBT victory that this country has recently experienced.

I do not want to resay any of the hateful, racist, xenophobic, and misogynist things the president elect has said. I will not restate the accusations of the at least twelve individual women who have pressed charges against him for sexual assault. The point right now is the fact that a man who campaigned on hate – hatred of Muslims, immigrants, women, people of color, disabled people, was elected president last night. And the man who will be working most closely with him has real experience regulating women and queer bodies.

So there is pain right now. If you are feeling it, do know that the campus has counseling services and they are expecting us. If you are not feeling it, I ask you to respect those of us who are. Please don't make this about a political contest. As one of my colleagues said, "This is not about being a sore loser because 'my' candidate didn't win. This is about an assault on human dignity." Those of us who are in pain are in pain because these two men won by mobilizing hate against the majority of us. People actually voted for them BECAUSE of the hate they spewed. They got more votes than all the polls

showed because clearly people were ashamed to admit they were going to vote for these two hate mongers and clearly they now feel empowered. Hate crimes will go up. Period. Sexual assault will go up. Period. The highest office in the land has legitimized racist xenophobia and misogyny as a way to govern and a vast section of the electorate were thrilled with the mandate.

And now these two are empowered to advance and likely pass laws that compromise the physical and personal autonomy of women, people of color, immigrants, Muslims, and on and on. We are hurt. We are scared. And we are numb. Please let folks grieve.

As a group we processed. Some of the students had clearly been crying. Some had been fighting with their families. One young Latina woman described basically being harassed by her white stepfather who was gloating about the Trump victory. One young man still brought up Hillary's emails. One student dug up a video of a husky "talking" to lighten everyone's mood. And unfortunately, Julie and so many others were not wrong. Hate crimes have gone up (Barrouquere, 2018; Choi, 2019; Johnson, 2018) and sexual assault victim/survivors continue to come forward en masse (Sacks, 2018).

As of this writing, things should not be looking good for Trump or his family from a legal perspective but he and his administration continue to falsely claim he was exonerated by the Mueller report, disregard calls to testify to congress as if it is an optional part of normal government functioning, and thus act as if they are above the law. Even if Trump, his family, and more of his legal team, and accomplices are found guilty yet he is still able to escape impeachment, the symbolic damage has still been done. (We say "symbolic" to differentiate from the material or policy damage, i.e., appointing two Supreme Court justices, etc.) First, he was elected. True, not by popular vote, but there were 62,979,879 people (to Hillary Clinton's 65,844,954) (Krieg, 2016) in the United States, 47% of them white women (Pew Research Center, 2018)⁴, at the very minimum OK with and in many cases ecstatic about having a president who bragged about sexually assaulting women and was an unapologetic racist xenophobe. That reality cannot be undone and is related to the collective hurt and trauma Julie referred to in the comments she read to her students the night after the election. This election inserted a new level of distrust into what felt like the airstream and it will not automatically disappear even if Trump and his family do.

Second, a long-term by product of his presidency, whether he and his family go to jail or not, is the emboldened culture of hate. White supremacists and misogynists see themselves every morning in the Twittersphere; they see their ideology in the

4. 54% is the number that has been accepted since the election but that number comes from exit polls not verified voters (Cable News Network [CNN], 2016).

highest office in the land and arguably the world, an office that should categorically be denouncing them. They see a man lead via bullying, name calling, and antisocial behavior that many people consciously raise their children NOT to emulate. But for two-plus years white supremacists and misogynists have had a role model validating them and with that level of emboldenment it is unlikely they will return quietly to their closets (or basements) even if Trump and his family are served justice, be it via the law or the ballot box. This culture of hate comes into our classrooms and lives in the form of student bullies, trolls, unwelcome video cameras, doxing, stalking, and the like.

Third, his administration has called the very idea of verifiable reality into question. The term “alternative facts” came very early from his original spin-queen Kellyanne Conway when she defended the administration’s inflated numbers of inauguration attendees (Bradner, 2017). As a university professor, particularly one in a discipline that has always been considered “subjective” and “biased” this is perhaps one of the more troubling of Trump’s legacies. We cannot have students in our classrooms who treat the material we assign and teach as un-credible, as an “alternative fact,” or “fake news.” This administration has created a discourse for erasing analyses that are unflattering to them - even when said analysis is based entirely on their own words - and for those of us who teach against dominant narratives of gender, power, race, and privilege, students slinging verdicts of “fake news,” or “fake school” against us completely undermines the credibility of our teaching and their learning.

We could go on and on, but we want to make just two more points which are most specific to *Taking Risks* and feminist activist scholarship in the Americas: Trump’s misogyny and his racism toward Latinx folks. Needless to say, Trump’s complete disregard for women was well known long before election night. Certainly the infamous Access Hollywood video encapsulates it as he is literally bragging about his self-perceived right to sexually assault women. Just as the Access Hollywood tape was the quintessential embodiment of his misogyny prior to the election, we maintain that the Kavanaugh hearings were since he has been in office (at least as of this writing.) Indeed, sexual assault survivors were triggered in droves in response to both (Abrams, 2018).

Why did Kavanaugh matter so much? The Kavanaugh hearings were a textbook case in misogyny and gendered double standards⁵. Certainly most reasonable people would conclude that a person with Kavanaugh’s temperament, as displayed during the hearings, is not worthy of a life appointment to the Supreme Court, even if that was his only flaw. The point that is of most significance here, however, is that Trump

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5. It is way beyond the scope of this paper to dissect those hearings and demonstrate this point but one interesting story came out in *Elle* magazine by Eric Thomas (2018) that gives a concise overview of the double standards in what is emotionally acceptable for men versus women.

did not withdraw Kavanaugh's name once Dr. Blasey Ford came forward with her extremely credible, easily verifiable, and wholly disturbing allegations of attempted rape. Needless to say, this is not a surprise but the message is "I don't care if you tried to rape a woman, you are still qualified to sit on the U.S. Supreme Court, forever, and make decisions about her and all other women's lives and bodies." We know Trump had no previous relationship with Kavanaugh, and he had a list of more than twenty potential judges that were poised to pass the highly conservative and influential Federalist Society's litmus test (Achenbach, 2018; The Week Staff, 2018). If Trump's administration had one shred of respect for women, he would have withdrawn Kavanaugh's name and put forth a new nominee that would have advanced the exact same judicial agenda; an agenda which of course will be equally hateful toward women and LGBTQ folks. Rather, leaving Kavanaugh's name in communicates to all women survivors brave enough to come forward means they should expect not to be believed and only met with humiliation, bullying, and disdain. Trump doubled down on his support and emboldened the Republican senators to hire a woman lawyer to do their dirty work, a lawyer Chuck Grassley, chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee referred to as their "lady assistant", because even they could not handle the optics of old white men interrogating a poised, articulate, woman professor, exposing their candidate as a sexual predator. Instead, they fawned all over their candidate, were unconcerned with his temper tantrum and his, at least, thirty references to love of beer (Leach, 2018) and apologized for how hard this all must be on *him*. They disregarded the daily protests, the shelling of phone calls, and claimed that there was a real investigation that proved Kavanaugh was innocent. (There was not; he is not.) The whole misogynist spectacle was one, long, painful, and literally triggering statement that this administration and republicans believe that rape is OK, rapists are qualified to make legal decisions for life, and survivors should not be believed.

Yes, Dr. Blasey Ford did not say he actually raped her, but she did make it clear that he attempted to and the only reason he did not was because he was so drunk she was able to force him off her. But the president of the United States did not think that disqualified him for serving for life as a Supreme Court justice. In other words, we have sunk to levels of dehumanization of women that feel psychologically reminiscent of the Victorian Era, not the 21st century where a woman presidential candidate won the popular vote by nearly three million votes. Thus, feminist *everything* matters, and in our case, feminist activist scholarship. Because activist scholarship is completely unapologetic about our explicit politics and social justice convictions; it is even more urgent in such times given the daily assault on justice swallowing both the northern and southern hemispheres.

Finally, Trump's assault on Latinx folks. Scapegoating immigrants is nothing new and it is certainly not the sole domain of the republicans. It is probably fair to say that Trump's xenophobic fury is evenly distributed between Muslims and Latinx people. He did, however, declare his candidacy and accuse Mexicans of being rapists and drug dealers in the same breath, thus centering his campaign on his yet-to-be-funded border wall meant to keep out Latin American refugee/immigrants turned criminals via the MAGA narrative. At every campaign rally Trump further pathologized Latinx communities. It was part of the script that happened in real time and the media, mesmerized by his campaign, his antics, and his followers, showed his rallies on television as if they were newsworthy, when in reality they were speeches replete with verbal typos, bold faced lies, and racist/xenophobic slurs. A signature at every rally went something like this: Trump: "Who's gonna pay for the wall?" Audience: "Mexico!!" He effectively brought those xenophobic throngs out to publicly spew their racism and feel validated doing so.

While we were writing the first draft of this paper, two-plus years into his administration, the government was shut down because Trump refused to agree to a spending budget that did not include funding for his wall, a shutdown, he said, he would be proud to claim responsibility for about a week prior to it happening. (He of course subsequently blamed the democrats) (Wade, 2018). This is not to suggest that the Minute Man-esque people⁶ did not exist pre-Trump; rather, they just were not all so comfortable spitting on their neighbors or allowing their kids to be publicly cruel to the Latinx kids at school. The other part of this is the fear Trump unleashed into Latinx communities. Even if one's DACA status is no closer to expiring than it was prior to Trump there is a whole new level of fear in Latinx communities. Within days of the election we had undocumented students deciding majors based on how long it would take, just in case they got deported, not based on what they wanted to study. Kids went to school not sure if their parents would be there when they got home. The level of insecurity that his hate fueled rhetoric and policies pumped into Latinx communities makes scholarship about the Americas that much more important. Julie is fortunate to teach at a school with a very diverse student body. And she knows from experience that the Latinx students who have been educated in the States have learned very little, if anything, about their own or their families' histories in their formal schooling. If the Trump administration is working so hard

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 6. The Minute Man Project was a homegrown border militia started in the mid-2000s that later splintered into several factions who still patrol (mostly) the southern border. They independently cooperate with U.S. border patrol to help intercept people from crossing the border, usually wearing military attire and carrying guns. There has been a recent surge of Minute Man militia groups as a response to the widely-publicized (thanks to Trump) Central American migrant caravans (Grant, 2018).

to undermine the dignity of these communities, Latinx students should at the very least take some comfort in seeing themselves accurately represented, with dignity, in their textbooks. Trump is literally trying to erase Latinx communities from the U.S. and feminist activist scholarship is about documentation and archives which makes disappearing impossible. Under this administration, survival is resistance; existence is resistance, and feminist activist scholarship is all three.

Brazil

Watching the entire 2018 Brazilian election living in the U.S. through social media made Jessica feel like she was going mad. Having watched the right-wing turn in the U.S. just a couple of years prior, it was like seeing history repeat itself again, but this time it hit even closer to home. Since Jessica had friends and a few family members living in the U.S., she mostly felt reassurance from many that despite the turning of events, there were still people out there actively fighting Trump and his hate-filled administration. When it became time for the Brazilian election, however, Jessica, who lived in Brazil up until she was 18 years old, saw many of her close friends and family members turned into fervent Bolsonaro supporters. They actively campaigned for him by posting on social media multiple times a day, attending rallies, and sending trails upon trails of “fake news” via WhatsApp (Barragán, 2018). It was like having your heart broken twice, with very few pieces left to pick up after Bolsonaro’s win. During the election cycle, Bolsonaro’s supporters reportedly attacked and killed individuals solely based on (presumed) political affiliation, sexual orientation, among other socio-demographic markers (Maciel; Lavor; Roza; Ribeiro; Lázaro, 2018). Such attacks, unfortunately, are likely a preview of what will happen now that he has taken office. (We wrote the first draft of this paper on his third day of office so it is too soon to know, but if the patterns are the same as what we saw between the Trump campaign and Trump presidency hate crimes will no doubt spike.)

Bolsonaro, a retired captain of the Brazilian Army, never hid his nostalgia towards the Brazilian Military regimes since the very beginning of his political career. He believes his administration’s main goal is to make Brazil similar to what it was forty or fifty years ago; meaning a return to “law and order,” traditional Christian heteronormative patriarchal values, and where “the minorities bend down to the majority” (Gielow; Fernandes, 2018; Nugent, 2018). He appointed Paulo Guedes as the Minister of Economics, who worked alongside the “Chicago Boys” during the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile (1973-1990)⁷. Seven out of twenty ministers named thus far are military men

7. The “Chicago boys” were a group of economists from the University of Chicago who worked closely with both the U.S. government and Chilean dictatorship to build a neoliberal economy that would promptly

(O Globo, 2018). In other words, Bolsonaro's top priority is reenacting the military regime's legacy, a place in time where dissenting voices of activist scholars and students were effectively suppressed if not altogether exiled or murdered.

It is not hyperbole to say that Jessica literally feels Bolsonaro is a threat to her lesbian of color existence. The threats take many forms. For example, "education reform" strategies similar to those of the military regimes (1964-1985), like transforming several public schools into civic-military schools and restarting the dictatorship-era school subject "Moral and Civic Education" (Soares, 2019). Civic-military schools, which have been touted by conservatives as model schools in Brazil, are places where values like discipline, law, and order are placed over critical thinking and freedom of expression (Uchôa, 2018). Implementing "Civic and Moral Education" as a subject in all public schools serves to reinforce patriotism and respect for established institutions, as well as preparation for heteronormative marriage as a means of "building character" (Wiziack; Fernandes; Carneiro, 2018). These methods serve two functions: to repress in real time and to invoke the dictatorship as a legitimate style of rule. The threats are felt in the policy realms when he appoints far right allies who further his misogynistic, homophobic, transphobic and racist rhetoric. Thus, now more than ever there is a need to continue supporting activist research to assure that Brazilians at the margins are not completely erased from public policies, archives, and discourse.

In his hopes of returning Brazil to the dictatorship era, Bolsonaro is seeking to completely change the landscape of Brazilian education. Like the dictatorship, his focus is upon destroying anything that even remotely resembles the Marxist ideology which he believes the Workers Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores - PT) advanced. Under this guise, he wants to eliminate from public schools anything linked to what he and other reactionaries call "gender ideology;" a term the Christian extremist right uses to describe a variety of practices, including teaching people that gender is socially constructed and non-binary, or heterosexuality is not the only sexual identity or practice, and even extremely basic sex education (Pinho, 2018). In addition to reshaping the present and indeed future via denying sex education, Bolsonaro also wants to rewrite history. His education policy advisee during the presidential campaign, Alessio Ribeiro Souto, maintains that books that do not tell what he calls the "truth" about the 1964 Brazilian coup should be banned from schools. According to Alessio Ribeiro, the "truth" should emphasize how the dictatorship promoted general economic growth, and those military regimes' allies also suffered losses (in reality a

unravel the advances of democratically elected socialist Salvador Allende; advances that were very antithetical to U.S. capitalist interests, particularly during the cold war as they were designed to benefit the Chilean poor and working classes (Shayne, 2004).

little more than two hundred) in their fight against the so-called communist threat. This revisionist narrative, maintained by other generals in South America, advances a logic that suggests there were two equally armed sides of a civil war rather than a military regime waging war against a predominantly unarmed civilian population. The narrative, especially if legitimized in history books, makes it sound as if the thousands of tortured, killed, disappeared, and exiled Brazilians were simply casualties for the benefit of the Brazilian economy⁸. It is safe to assume that Bolsonaro's history books will likely not include the words "torture" and "exile," and will no doubt hugely underestimate the number of civilian casualties.

Bolsonaro also wants to eliminate any of Paulo Freire's philosophies in the Education Ministry and as a consequence, in schools. (Not surprisingly, Paulo Freire figures heavily in Julie's teaching, including in one of the classes Jessica took with her, and helped us frame *Taking Risks*.) To fulfill this objective, he nominated Minister of Education Ricardo Vélez Rodríguez, who believes that the previous Workers' Party administration tried to impose on the Brazilian society a Marxist ideology, through a "Gramscian-inspired cultural revolution" that Ricardo Vélez believes served a function of broadening the interests of "organic intellectuals"⁹, or the very same activists and activists researchers who were at the center of *Taking Risks* and motivate these reflections. Indeed, the concept of Gramsci's "organic intellectuals" was central to framing the entire book (Shayne; Leissle, 2014: xx-xxiv). Vélez deems organic intellectuals, who have worked to create a curriculum embracing gender diversity and history pedagogy with a critical thinking approach, as a threat to "traditional" Brazilian societal values: the protection of life (read: anti-reproductive choice; involuntary motherhood), the heteronormative family, religion, and patriotism. Hence, by extension, "organic intellectuals" endanger the aforementioned policies Bolsonaro hopes to advance. Ricardo Vélez and Bolsonaro ultimately wish to disempower marginalized voices, eliminating Paulo Freire's inspired popular education-focused policies, which allow marginalized Brazilians to have a voice and participate in their own education. Freirian policies and practices also guarantee marginalized voices stay in the curriculum and this administration wants to write them all out of existence

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8. The numbers of Brazilians murdered, tortured, disappeared, and exiled during the 1964-1985 military regime is heavily debated. The Brazilian National Commission of Truth, approximately 434 people died or disappeared (Comissão Nacional da Verdade, 2018). Other sources estimate anything between 1.8 to 20 thousand were tortured and 5-10 thousand people were exiled (Magalhães, 2014; Memorial da Democracia, 2018).

9. Ricardo Vélez Rodríguez later deleted the post where he made this argument from his personal blog, however, many journalistic sources (both liberal and conservative) cite the same "Letter to the Ministry of Education" over and over again (Campos, 2018; Pessoa; Fernandes, 2018; Jiménez, 2018; to mention a few).

- be it through things like banning gender curriculum in the schools, establishing more military-led schools, and/or rewriting the history of the 1964 coup.

It should come as no surprise, then, that Bolsonaro wants to keep forging his bigotry throughout other ministries, too. While President Dilma Rousseff created and restructured the Ministry for Women, Racial Equality, and Human Rights, Bolsonaro in turn changed the ministry's name to the Ministry for Women, Family and Human Rights. The name change itself here is important because it moves Bolsonaro's agenda away from racial equality as well as further entangles women and human rights with the concept of the heteronormative patriarchal family¹⁰. Perhaps the most illustrative embodiment of this ideology is his appointment of an ultraconservative, women pastor named Damara Alves to lead it. Damara is openly against abortions, does not believe in gender theory and actively campaigned against the inclusion of gender discussions in schools (Missão Maria de Nazaré, 2018). In an interview with a conservative online news channel, she affirmed she worries about the women's absence in the home and criticized feminists for widening the divide between men and women (Siqueira, 2018). While she's putting up a facade claiming she will fight for women and LGBTQ+'s rights by bridging the differences between the left and the radical Christian right, her track record clearly seeks to promote an agenda that does the exact opposite, creating a hostile and dangerous cultural climate for queers and women activists. In Brazil, abortion is largely illegal and unavailable, except with some exceptions; there is no honest focus on the promotion of gender equality, diversity and inclusion; and we know a push for "traditional values" are devices to silence the voices of those who are not part of the status quo. Since the very ministry that is supposed to promote human rights for all Brazilians has morphed into yet another tool of oppression, recording and archiving oppressed voices and disseminating those stories is now more important than ever as it can serve as a method of resistance against Bolsonaro and Demara's exclusionary policies.

To continue advancing his anti-indigenous and anti-Black rhetoric, on his very first day in office Bolsonaro signed a decree taking away FUNAI's (the federal organization historically in charge of assigning and delineating indigenous lands as well as advancing public policy to protect indigenous nations) right to delineate indigenous lands and placed it into the hands of the Ministry of Agriculture. This decision also affects Afro-Brazilian communities, as FUNAI protects *quilombos*, settlements that once served as safe havens for Black enslaved people who ran away from their masters and are still to this day still occupied by Afro-Brazilians descendants. If Congress approves the decree, it will allow the Ministry of Agriculture (controlled by wealthy

10. Augusto Pinochet did something strikingly similar after seizing power through a military coup in Chile (Baldez, 2002).

farmers and interest groups) the ability to destroy what is left of Brazilian rainforests and indigenous lands in the name of expanding agrobusiness¹¹. The damage this policy will do for both indigenous people and Afro-Brazilians is irreparable and irreversible, as their connection to ancestral lands act as the backbone of their traditions, their culture, their communities, and is indeed part of their identity. In the words of Maria Rosalina dos Santos, Piauí state coordinator for Piauí’s *Quilombolas* Communities:

We have communities over 300 years old, it’s more than four generations in that land, with its own way of life and its own customs. The land, for us, is our roots. If we don’t have the land, we will be dead. It’s not the land, but the territory and its elements which are our parents and our identity. We affirm and reaffirm this, through our way of life, which varies from one [*quilombola*] community to another (ONU Mulheres Brasil, 2017).

Bolsonaro’s policies are actively seeking to silence and delegitimize voices like Maria Rosalina dos Santos, her ancestors, her culture, her identity, and ultimately, her humanity. Anytime he refers to either indigenous or *quilombolas* communities, his focus is never on preserving land and culture but rather on accelerating assimilation so they may become “productive” members of society (Bolsonaro, 2018). The current lack of Brazilian indigenous and *quilombolas*’ archives combined with Bolsonaro’s policies present an urgent need to support organic intellectuals and feminist activist scholars within and/or researching these communities (Monteiro, 2018). As their lands may be taken away at any moment, indigenous and *quilombolas*’ shared histories and cultures must be recorded in books and archives before it may be tragically and unimaginably too late.

While Jessica was working on this paper, she was in the process of renewing her then-expired passport so she could take her Venezuelan wife to Brazil for the first time. Not a day later, she read the headlines that LGBTQ+ couples were rushing to the courthouses to get married before Bolsonaro took power on January 1, 2019 (Darlington, 2018). Jessica has undeniable privileges (she is cisgender, she is middle class, she graduated college, to name a few) which shelters her from many of these leaders’ policies. Nevertheless, it still feels like both places she calls home are actively trying to erase who she is. There is heightened meaning to resistance as a means of existence, not just for herself as a queer WOC, but also to all Brazilians who do not fit the Bolsonaro’s racist, patriarchal, homophobic and heteronormative mold. Bolsonaro’s policies may not erase all marginalized Brazilians overnight, but it is clear that

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11. It is beyond the scope of this paper to touch on the environmental impact Bolsonaro’s policies will have on the Amazon rainforest and other protected natural reserves in Brazil, but an article in *Science* by Herton Escobar (2018) explains in detail this administration’s potential for environmental damage.

the main goal is to crush these communities and silence the oppressed, whether by slowly displacing Brazilian indigenous people and *quilombolas* from ancestral lands; taking away safe abortions and sexual education; delegitimizing gender discussions in schools; sanctioning education reforms that legitimize military regimes and the superiority of the white heteronormative patriarchal family, and justify the systematic oppression of those who dare to live their lives in defiance of and/or speak against the status quo. Supporting feminist activist scholarship and organic intellectuals is now more important than ever as their work serves to both document the stories of the oppressed, making sure it is safe in archives and books, and can be also used as a tool to undermine the Bolsonaro administration.

From Intellectual Praxis to Political Imperative

While Trump was elected under the charged motto “Make America Great Again,” Bolsonaro was elected under the questionable claim that he “tells it like it is” (by being racist, homophobic, misogynist) and he promised to abolish political corruption in Brazil. Trump has yet to deliver his broken MAGA policy promises – namely the wall, and Bolsonaro has already proven to be anything but honest. Yet both have been absolutely unwavering on their promised xenophobia, misogyny, queerphobia, transphobia, and utter lack of empathy. For Bolsonaro, as of this writing it is way too early to see what he will be accomplish of his hate filled agenda, though he was off to a swift start. For Trump, as noted, many of his promises remain unkept. Additionally, the democrats were recently sworn in with a seventeen person congressional majority, a majority that includes 108 women (98 in congress, 17 in the senate) ten more LGBTQ folks (8 in congress, 2 in the senate), and 23 more POC¹². That is, a room full of people Trump campaigned against not as politicians but as members of marginalized communities (Reynolds, 2019; Edmondson; Lee, 2019). This congress gives us hope on symbolic and practical levels, and hopefully Brazil will have a comparable progressive backlash in its next elections.

This swing in the U.S. and dream of a comparable one in Brazil means the left must remain vigilant, especially because of Trump’s and Bolsonaro’s flourishing friendship. They will likely seek to influence and control policy in the Americas as arguably the most powerful countries in the continents (Associated Press, 2019). With our different locations in the academy, we maintain that feminist activist scholarship is the space to mobilize our feminist activist sensibilities; our fury against Trump

12. Not surprisingly, because today’s new congress is the most diverse one ever, the group is full of a collection of “firsts.” See <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/day-historic-firsts-congress-n954236>

and Bolsonaro, and their ideologies and campaigns hell-bent on stifling everything we believe feminist activist scholarships stands for. In the case of Jessica's work as a college administrator, she feels even more inspired to continue empowering marginalized students and their respective communities who both of these leaders literally actively seek to silence, delegitimize, and ultimately destroy.

For Julie, her activist work is about growing Gender, Women & Sexuality Studies (GWSS) at UW Bothell and launching our alumni into the so-called "real world." The deeper we get into the Trump regime, the more activist and urgent the project becomes. We know that GWSS *everywhere* started through activism: from the first U.S. program at San Diego State University (Salper, 2011), to Gender Studies at the University of Chile, to Women's Studies in South Korea (Jung, 2013). The activism that powers GWSS will never be quelled. As Julie works hard to grow the degree she approaches the activism from a variety of approaches, knowing that this administration requires feminists in every corner – from the HR offices working on sexual harassment in the work place, to the ACLU defending Roe V. Wade, to therapists counseling survivors of gender based trauma, to the librarians responsible for filling the elementary school shelves. Anyone who works those and so many other jobs needs feminist theory taught via an activist scholarship lens to do their work from a social justice perspective. But the work of GWSS does not start and stop in the classroom.

GWSS is not only about teaching hidden histories; it's an activist project that primes the next generation to undo misogynist damage and remake feminist futures. Julie's GWSS activist scholarship these past three years has been highly attentive to this and the Trump-induced urgency of that project. She has done the hard work to recruit majors. Students don't major in GWSS because there is a linear path to a job and given the student debt they will end up with, a job is a very real thing to worry about. She has made countless pitches to student activist organizations, colleague's classes, and at campus recruitment events explaining GWSS and why students should choose this major. She has also worked hard to develop GWSS's career resources, everything from brochures to a highly successful social justice career panel and resource fair making the case to students that you can pursue your passion for social justice, get paid for it, and GWSS is the major to help you do that. She has also spent time developing a feminist community on campus with their signature end of the year celebrations, partly for the faculty since so much faculty labor is invisible and exhausting, they need a communal place to be acknowledged and thus recharged so they can keep this feminist battle going. The event also celebrates student winners of a feminist praxis award, publicly valuing activist scholarship as students bring their UW Bothell academic careers to a close. She has also worked with students to get their clubs active, promoted, and in conversation with one another partly through a very active

social media presence. And perhaps the most hidden and underacknowledged part of feminist activist scholarship: emotional labor. Julie has written about this elsewhere but for those of us who do this work, it is a well-known secret that it is women and minoritized faculty and staff who do the emotional labor our marginalized students need in order to thrive on campus, especially in such hateful times (Shayne, 2017). Emotional labor is some of the very hardest of all activist scholarship; it is entirely unremunerated and in many cases is professionally risky, but without it, many of our marginalized students will simply not graduate given an across the board institutional failure of U.S. universities to support them, stated public missions, or not.

In closing, if the university is our locale, we need to blast these spaces with our feminist activist scholarship, and not just in the archives and books which remain the purview of those who have access to our classrooms, but to the spaces outside of the classroom, and eventually outside of the university so the activism becomes as normal as the air we breathe. We need to inspire and train feminist workers who leave academia to bring this activism with them into their public and private sector jobs. *Taking Risks* was a wonderful project; an intellectually stimulating, interdisciplinary, and cross-hemispheric project. It was energizing for both Julie and Jessica. It launched us into activist scholarship before we really knew what it was. Now here, we cannot go back and unfortunately, Trump and Bolsonaro remind us of that every single day. Today's activist scholarship is also interdisciplinary and cross-hemispheric; the difference is, this time it is not simply intellectual praxis but rather political imperative.

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