

Kristen Hogan: *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability*. Duke University Press: Durham, NC. 2016.

By Nicole M. Rizzuto, Drew University, USA

1 If Kristen Hogan's time at the Toronto Women's Bookstore was "a love story," (Hogan 86) then her book *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability* is the longest 'Dear John' letter ever written. While Hogan fell in love with Feminist Bookstores during the 1990s and the 2000s, this book chronicles the long war and eventual defeat of feminist bookstores by capitalist bookstores. Hogan charted the rise and fall of the feminist bookstore movement through the lifespan of the *Feminist Bookstore News*, beginning in 1976 and ending at the dawn of the 21st century. Through creating the historical narrative of the Feminist Bookstore movement, Kristen Hogan also introduces the ideas of lesbian antiracist accountability, the feminist shelf, and feminist remembering. These three concepts are important additions to feminist thought and should be further analyzed within the discipline.

2 *The Feminist Bookstore Movement* is separated into seven sections, categorized both chronologically and thematically. Hogan first maps how feminist bookstores formed and incorporated feminist, antiracist collectives within the capitalist system in part one, which spanned from 1970 to 1976. She then looks at how feminist bookstores remained accountable to one another, an aspect of feminist bookstore management in which Hogan believes the *Feminist Bookstore News* and its editor Carol Seajay played a pivotal role. Part three covers the early 1980s, which can be seen as the highpoint of Feminist Bookstores. In this section, Hogan shows how conferences, book orders, lobbying efforts, and romantic and platonic relationships allowed feminist bookstore workers to work together to influence the publishing industry on a global level. At the same time, these women

were able to remain accountable to one another in their efforts to create safe spaces for antiracist feminist activism and education. It is not until part four that Hogan introduces the feminist shelf, which is the most important new idea introduced in *The Feminist Bookstore Movement*. Hogan ends the work by looking at how the feminist bookstore movement was destroyed by its war against large publishing houses and mainstream booksellers, such as *Barnes and Noble* and *Amazon.com*. In her epilogue, Hogan reflects on what the feminist bookstore movement provided to the feminist movement as a whole and how the ideas introduced by feminist bookstores can continue to influence lesbian antiracist accountability in the 21st century and the world of digital bookstores.

3 The role of feminist bookstores within feminism is a topic Hogan has studied for over a decade, and her interest and knowledge of the topic is evident throughout *The Feminist Bookstore Movement*. Her most remarkable contribution to feminist thought is the introduction of the feminist shelf. This concept encapsulates the practice, common at many feminist bookstores throughout the late 20th century, of curating bookshelves so as to group books by theme and construct a syllabus of certain areas of feminist studies. Hogan cites shelves which included African-American, African-Canadian, and Asian-American sections at various bookstores. She also discussed grouping books based on subjects such as lesbian motherhood, domestic abuse, and other experiential categories, which would enable women to find models and vocabularies for their experiences. This practice went beyond the perfunctory ‘diversity’ section of mainstream bookstores. Furthermore, it allowed for visitors to engage more intimately with the books while they found community and activism within their bookshelves. The idea of the feminist shelf, constructed through a dedication to antiracist accountability, is an important idea that requires further explanation in order to be better incorporated into feminist thought.

4 Although the idea of antiracist accountability and the feminist shelf offer new lenses through which scholars can approach feminist writing, Hogan's work primarily documents events and decisions without offering explanation or theoretical frameworks. Although she explored moments in which bookstore workers were held accountable for racist views, she never delves into the conversations that took place and only offers a few actions taken to hold feminists responsible for racist actions. Hogan relies heavily on the *Feminist Bookstore News* as the space for feminist antiracist accountability, but does not offer much in the way of the newsletter's content or examples of its letters and articles rooted in transnational accountability. In her epilogue, Hogan suggests that a major point of *The Feminist Bookstore Movement* was to inspire a sense of feminist remembering. Feminist remembering is a practice through which feminists could reintroduce antiracist accountability, as previously insured by the feminist shelf, into feminist discourse. However, without offering models for the vocabulary and language used to hold one another accountable, Hogan gives her readers little in the way of preparation for feminist remembering.

5 At times *The Feminist Bookstore Movement* reads more like a nostalgic memoir than a historical narrative of the rise and fall of feminist bookstores and their collective activism. This work would benefit from a greater emphasis on spatial theory and borderlands theory, both of which would expand the idea of the feminist shelf. Ideally, Hogan will write a follow-up book to this work, allowing for greater rumination on the role of feminist shelf in the Digital Age. Despite this shortcoming, however, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement* is an essential addition to feminist studies, especially for those in the discipline interested in the influence of print on the movement. So much of feminism has been articulated through books and circulated by feminist bookstores. By documenting the rise and fall of the

feminist bookstore movement, Hogan has done a great service to both the history and the future of feminism.