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Elisa Facio and Irene Lara. Fleshing the Spirit: Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women's Lives

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Elisa Facio and Irene Lara. *Fleshing the Spirit: Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women's Lives*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2014. \$29.95 Paper. 240pp. ISBN 978-0-8165-3097-7.

Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women's Lives is a rich anthology comprised of essays, living theories, vivid poetry, and *conocimiento*. Elisa Facio and Irene Lara weave this collection together with contributions from a diverse spectrum of Feminist/Chicana writers, artists, scholars, activists and “culture carriers.” The editors¹ organize each section in relationship to the four sacred cardinal directions to honor the transformative energies and symbolism they represent for aspects of the journeys that the contributors offer (13). This book addresses the gendered, sexualized, classed, and radicalized spiritualities of Chicanas, Latinas, and Indigenous women through their own voices. The perspectives shared highlight the pain of confusion and alienation, along with the re-membering that takes place as these women work at healing from the oppressive patriarchal system of the Catholic church. However, what at times may seem to be developing as a critique of the Church grows into a series of stories illustrating the ways generations of women have had to overcome repressive structures in order to maintain a healthy relationship to the values of family and religious traditions. This anthology illuminates the readers' understanding of the common intentions held by these women in their academic and spiritual quests to de-colonize their relationship to spirituality by making it relevant to their lives, inspire action for social change, and support healing and justice in communities (3). The editors integrate in a new way an assemblage of interdisciplinary readings, while the contributors examine particular themes. For example, a borderland *mestizaje* framework is examined as honoring the wisdom of the body as a

¹ One of the editors, Elisa Facio, died in August 2018.

producer of knowledge while holding “memories of social struggle, identity formation, and redemption” (85).

In *Writing with Crooked Lines*, Laura E. Pérez describes an endearing moment when Jesuit theologian Father Eduardo Fernández offers her words of encouragement as she works to write about complex hybrid spiritualities (23). This interaction contributes to the overriding tone of healing in this book and to its resonance with the constant change that faith traditions undergo today. Many of the women point to ways that their spirituality informs and inspires their social activism (94). In reference to the “anti-Mexican” legislation in Arizona and other places that bans books and cultural history from education programs, contributor Lara Medina notes, “These are dangerous and scary times” (182). In this context, this anthology is critical for educating communities and building bridges between indigenous and Catholic faith-keepers.

The anthology also offers intimate testimonies of how many of these women continue to open their hearts to the feminine face of God by understanding La Virgen de Guadalupe on their own terms, separate from the Catholic institution. Medina explains how women find it necessary to “reject attempts by the Church to subjugate women and still hold on to Guadalupe as a symbol of feminine power, strength, and liberation.” Many of the writers refer to their relationship to the divine mother with her given Nahuatl name, Tonantzin. Medina acknowledges the pre-colonial relationships to Tonantzin and the sacred feminine by saying, “La Virgen was not originally connected to the Church and she does not have to be now” (92). La Virgen de Guadalupe-Tonantzin’s multiple meanings are shaped by women’s individual desires to partake in an anti-colonial spirituality that connects them to a sacred indigenous/*mestizo/a* worldview (93).

This anthology lifts up the sources and resilience of Mexican spirituality and its presence in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous women's liberation work. The voices of these women, their faith-walks, and their activism ring loud in these stories that serve to inspire us all.

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