

**GLOBAL FEMINISMS PROJECT PODCAST SERIES:  
CONTEXTUALIZING FEMINIST VOICES:  
TEACHING WITH THE GLOBAL FEMINISMS PROJECT**

**Topic: Comparative Courses on Global Feminisms**

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**Intro:** Welcome to Contextualizing Feminist Voices: Teaching with the Global Feminisms Project. This series is focused on teaching, pedagogy and uses of the archive in the context of the classroom. Designed with a special emphasis on educators, in each episode you will learn from instructors who have used the project's interviews in their courses, and about activities and resources for incorporating the archive into your class.

**Zoe Boudart:** This episode features recordings from the Global Feminisms Project's conference: "Teaching Global Feminisms: Using Activist Interviews Across Disciplines," which took place virtually on October 9, 2021. You can also view the entire program on our website. In this podcast, we will hear from University of Michigan Professor Emerita Wang Zheng, who will outline how she has used the resources in the Global Feminisms Project archive to teach comparative courses about the history of feminisms.

**Wang Zheng:** I have taught two courses based on the GFP interviews over the past 15 years. Let me focus on the more recent one, which is a first year seminar. With the title "Life Stories of Global Feminist Activists," this course selects 27 interviews of feminist activists from Brazil, China, India, Nicaragua, Poland and the US as the main body of text to study. Five documentary films provide either contextual information on the political and historical backgrounds of these very diverse activists.

I strove to make students understand both commonalities of feminist struggles cross culturally and differences among them conditioned by a range of factors. Besides expanding students' intellectual horizon with a global perspective, I also introduce some critical feminist concepts through analyzing these personal stories. An underlying agenda for me is to provide role models to empower these very young students, as I know intimately how powerfully these feminists have inspired me.

So what are the effects of the course? Let me share with you a story my student has shared with me.

At the beginning of a semester, I noticed a student's low mood and sad expression. She also missed one class. A few weeks later I received a message from the student affairs office informing me that the student who was in depression, and suggesting I take her mental health issue into consideration and give her permission if she decides to withdraw. But oddly I found the student performed better and better, and never missed any more classes. In the end, her excellent term paper explained puzzle. By the way, the term paper assignment asked the students to select three students [she means interviewees] from three different countries to form a coherent essay with a theme.

Her paper presents a theme of how three feminists rejected victimhood of sexual violence and became leading feminist activists in their respective countries to fight against violence against women. Here's a quotation from her paper:

"I could have not taken this course at a better and a more pertinent a time in my life. The hardships of the feminists I chose to cover in my paper are relatable to my current situation. Despite myself having extremely different life contexts than them, their differences further project our similarities. It is remarkable how these women transformed

traumatic experiences to inspire drastic changes that have improved lives of so many. I will take the lesson learned from them into the rest of my criminal case and into the rest of my life.”

The student was raped in the first week of the school, which resulted in her debilitating depression. Towards the end of the semester, she decided to take actions not only to start a lawsuit against the rapist but also to join that organization to help survivors of sexual violence. She certainly grasped the essence of what these feminists exemplified; that is, refuse the victimhood and take actions to change the world while transforming oneself. Agency and empowerment are no longer abstract concepts to this and other students. A shared key word students used in describing how the feminist interviews inspire them is “relatable.” The diverse life stories guarantee that this or that story will touch this or that student at various levels. Students of art major were enthused to find the role models in the feminist artists. Academically-oriented students were inspired by academic activists who connect knowledge production with social change programs. Students who wanted to involve in actions for social change were relieved to find there's no bar for becoming an activist. As long as you care enough about an issue, you surely can take some actions to address the problem. And agency is not something for you to acquire in the future, but can be demonstrated now and here.

Let me add one more story: a student proudly shared with me that she discovered a young guy with an equal credential as her working the same place during the doing the same job was paying much more than what she received. Inspired by the feminist life stories, she decided to pointed this out to her boss and got a pay raise, as a result. I'm certain this student's action will not stop at demanding an equal pay. It is to my gratification to see how much students have grown intellectually and emotionally by learning the amazing life stories of feminists around the world.

**Zoe Boudart:** As you have heard, Wang Zheng pointed to the value of these interviews in offering students detailed accounts by and about women who they can use as role models for activism, and for combining scholarship and activism. In addition to offering unique opportunities for making comparisons of things that are similar and different across different contexts, this inspirational feature of teaching with these interviews is very important. We hope you found this podcast helpful in thinking about your teaching, and that other podcasts in this series are too. Please let us know how you use Global Feminisms Project materials in your class. We would love to post examples from your teaching on our website in the Teaching Resources Section.

**Outro:** Thank you for listening to this episode of Contextualizing Feminist Voices: Teaching with the Global Feminisms Project, a podcast created by the Global Feminisms Project. The entire team hopes it will help you understand and incorporate the materials on the website into your class. If you liked this episode, check out the other podcasts in the series, as well as materials about countries, teaching resources, and interviews on the [website](#).