

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

Topic: Course on Indian Narratives of Gender Discrimination

**Host: Marisol Fila
Speaker: Christi Merrill**

**University of Michigan
Institute for Research on Women and Gender
1136 Lane Hall Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1290
Tel: (734) 764-9537**

**E-mail: um.gfp@umich.edu
Website: <http://www.umich.edu/~glbfem>**

© Regents of the University of Michigan, 2022

*Music credit: Banjo Arba Minch Garden by Cooper Moore. Creative Commons.
https://freemusicarchive.org/music/Cooper-Moore/A_Retrospective_1990-2010/h_Banjo_Arba_Minch_Garden*

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.

Marisol Fila: 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. On this podcast, we will hear from University of Michigan Professor Christi Merrill, who will outline how she has used the resources in the Global Feminisms Project archive to teach a literature course that focused on Indian narratives of gender discrimination. Please note that Professor Merrill refers to two photos she used to illustrate her points, which are reproduced on the project's [webpage](#).

Christi Merrill: Thanks to all the people who put all this work into putting together these materials (the archives and all the supporting materials). They talked me into incorporating some of this material into my class and I completely redesigned the course, and it's so much better, as a result. It brought out things I never would have expected. The course is organized around life stories, testimonies, and other nonfiction genres that deal with gender discrimination and other things. One of the things I introduced this time was a SPARROW [Sound and Pictures Archive of Research on Women, in Mumbai India] workshop pamphlet about a project that Urmila Pawar, pictured here with her collaborator Meenakshi Moon, took interviews of women involved in the anti-caste movement, and they wrote up their findings of interviews-- so oral histories and then other kind of background context of the anti- caste movement. And she has some really excellent ways of making fun of and also explaining how transnational feminism helped her come into her own as a feminist anti-caste activist and she was one of the people we [University of Michigan faculty] invited to participate in our anti-caste workshop the semester before. So several of the students in my course in the winter had spoken with her, had read her memoir, and read a really funny scene, where she talks about trying to be comfortable with the ways that the feminists in the organization in Bombay were talking down to her using an informal use of you in Marathi, and how she kept trying to assert her own learning and her own way of having agency. And it's just a beautiful scene that gets at something we spent the semester talking about: those moments like you see in this picture when it's very clear that she has agency in part because of her age, because of her literacy, and literacy is an especially important aspect of some of these life stories that we were reading. But also in the process we started to see that in some of the things that we were reading with the SPARROW booklet that was based on a workshop with her about this book that was

written in Marathi, and so it allowed us to talk not only about the politics of literacy, but also the hierarchies of language--for example, that she's not comfortable with English. But at the anti-caste workshop last semester, she spoke in Marathi and Hindi. There were a lot of materials that I was able to assign getting at some of these broader issues around translation and language politics that worked really well in this course. Another reason that I wanted the students to look at the SPARROW website and read something published by SPARROW, is I wanted them to become familiar with SPARROW, who was the local partner with the Global Feminisms Project in conducting some of these interviews. So it allowed us a way into several of these things-- one of the unexpected lovely benefits of working with this.

So I was then able to use some of the interviews that SPARROW did, for example the one between Shahjehan[Aapa] and Urvashi Butalia that's here, pairs really nicely with the interview that was done by the Global Feminisms Project, where Jayati Lal interviewed Urvashi Butalia in English sitting in chairs. And it had a very different kind of production value than when you see this one; they're sitting--in this scene they're sitting in bed together, they kind of move around to different places where Shahjehan lives and works, and they have costume changes and all kinds of things. They're speaking in Hindi with one another; there's an informality and that became a really important topic of discussion and the ways that they are collaborating with each other to bring out these narratives. So I write a lot about and teach a lot about these ways of reading life stories as nonfiction narratives, and think about agency and the relationships that we form with these subjects. It came up very differently when I ended up using three different interviews, and some of the students got so interested they wrote about other interviews that were in the archive. I also paired these with some materials that were published in 1997 in *Granta* magazine, the literary magazine, including a short life story by Shahjehan [Aapa] with this beautiful photograph that I've used here. And it's very interesting to see the ways that each of them as feminists kind of use those moments of coming into consciousness and figuring out how to turn some of the really difficult stories that they themselves experienced, or or those close to them experienced, and turn that into an agential way of making change. One of those ways that students could really see in that *Granta* special issue that was celebrating 50 years of independence, but both of them wrote about the horrific violence that Partition visited upon them. And in past years I taught a book by Urvashi Butalia called *The Other Side of Silence*. This time I didn't have them read the whole book; I had them read just that first excerpt called "Blood" that's published in *Granta* and, along with the interview, I think it gave a much fuller picture of what went into her decision to become a publisher and also guest editing the *Granta* magazine. There were a number of ways that she talked about herself as a publisher and activist that were very moving to the students and they wrote about these materials in really interesting ways.

Marisol Fila: As you have heard, Professor Merrill’s course really emphasizes aspects of narrative, language and translation, all of which are themes that are easy to demonstrate with materials from the archive, since our interviews are usually unedited, are a “life narrative” and include many smaller narratives within them, and when the interview was not conducted in English, we include transcripts of the original interview language as well as a translation on our website. We present the transcripts in English as though any translation is perfect; of course we understand that many key terms are highly contested and there are many different ways to translate a given phrase, so one is embodied in the transcript, but this is food for thought in classes on language with the languages that are in play. Teachers of Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Italian and Russian, all of which are represented on the website have found many ways to use the materials in the archive to think through issues of translation.

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](#).