

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

Topic: Global Feminisms Course

**Host: Maddie House
Speaker: Durba Mitra**

**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/~glblfem>**

© 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.

Hanna Smith: Today Dr. Durba Mitra, Richard B. Wolf Associate Professor of Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality at Harvard University, joins us on the podcast. She was voted a favorite professor at Harvard in both 2021 and 2022. Her research combines feminist and queer theory, centering the Global South. Dr. Mitra is the author of "Indian Sex Life: Sexuality and the Colonial Origins of Modern Social Thought", which was published in 2020, and is the current acting director of the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at Harvard.

Maddie House: Dr. Mitra, thank you so much for joining me today to discuss how to use the Global Feminisms Project archive in your teaching. Could you briefly describe the course you use the archive in?

Durba Mitra: Yes, first of all, thank you so much. I am such a huge fan of the Global Feminisms Project at Michigan. It has been such an extraordinary resource for me as a scholar and a teacher. I've used the Global Feminisms archive in different ways in different classes. But the course that I wanted to highlight today is a big General Education lecture course that I teach at Harvard University—open to all undergraduates—that's entitled Global Feminisms. You can see why it might be a good archive for such a class! And that class is, it's an undergraduate course. As I said, it's what they call a 'General Education course,' so there is a required General Education curriculum for Harvard undergraduates. And so this fulfills one of the four requirements for the Gen Ed course timeline that every college student at Harvard has to take. The topic, as I said, was global feminisms, and it is a course that thinks chronologically and through primary sources about the histories of feminisms in different parts of the world, with an emphasis on non-US-based feminist movements from the late eighteenth century until today and it really emphasizes the writings of feminists, and the work of feminists, including queer and trans feminisms. Um, The class is a lecture class. It meets twice a week, and then there is a section for the class, and the class can vary. Every year I've had to cap the class because there's a huge demand for this kind of work, I think, at Harvard and many colleges right now for good reason. And so both times I've capped the class, but the last time I taught the class something like two hundred and fifty or three hundred students tried to petition to come in, which is a big number

for a smaller university like Harvard, with a smaller undergraduate population.

Maddie House: That's great. I love the focus on primary source material. As a student, I found it so, so valuable. And how do you use the material in the archive in this specific course?

Durba Mitra: Yeah. So I agree. I think that primary sources allow the people who we are talking about to sing, right? That's what gives us the opportunity to hear the voices of people, and there is no better archive to think about the actual practice of hearing the voices of people like the Global Feminisms archive created at Michigan, in part because it allows you to think about the practice of oral historical work as a critical feminist practice. And, so, how do I use the sources? I use them in many different ways. I have an assignment in the class where students have to do a primary source analysis, and in the primary source analysis, they can take as one of their options—among many— the global feminist transcripts from the Global Feminisms archive as a primary source. So an interview with a prominent feminist, particularly from the global South, coming from places like South Asia, from India, in the Global Feminisms archive, and talking about analyzing how women narrate themselves, how they imagine how the narrative of self relates to the feminist practice. Students have also used the archive in relation to their final project for the class; there's two final projects. One is they have to create a feminist conference for present-day feminist issues—our Feminist Queer Conference—that models or resembles the kind of huge international feminist conferences that happened in the 1970s and '80s. In the past my students have used the Global Feminisms archive as a resource to hear feminists talk about those conferences which they've then used, you know, to think about how they are going to organize their own vision of a conference. The other major final project in my class—which is really how I use it—is that students make podcasts. And in their podcasts, they often talk about the figures who are featured on the Global Feminisms archive or engage with materials that are available there.

As a teacher, I use it in different ways. I use it in my lectures because the YouTube videos are accessible, and they are also close-captioned. So that makes sure that they are accessible to all of my students—all differently-abled students—and that allows students to hear the voices of people and see their comportment and see the way they talk about certain political and social issues in the time that the video was recorded. I also use the transcripts when I'm writing my lectures. So in the writing of lectures, if I'm interested or trying to portray what has happened in the feminist movements in Europe? What, you know, what is happening in Latin America? How do people talk about particular issues of feminist movements? I've often relied on this archive, among many, to think about the way feminists talk about the feminist work that they've been doing since the 1970s and '80s.

Maddie House: Fantastic. The final project sounds so engaging and there's such creative uses of the archive. Thanks for sharing. In your experience, what do you think is most effective about the way that you use the Global Feminisms material?

Durba Mitra: Most effective? So my Global Feminisms class is centered around music videos. Every first class of the week we start with a music video and every second class of the week we start with a feminist interview. So I want them to think about feminist practice as one that engages all of the senses. It is, of course, about reading and thinking, but it is also about the practice of being together, and what a feminist, you know, like, protest, would look like, or what does music do? How can we think about music as a practice of women's solidarity or queer solidarity? Why is the protest and music so deeply entwined? I think the interview does, you know, kind of complements that. It gives, again, the voices of women and it gives students the ability to hear the voices of women for the first time, really. And one of the things that I really think is extraordinary about the Global Feminisms archive is the fact that—that this project has been reporting the voices and the work of feminists who were otherwise not reported. I am a person who studies Third World and transnational feminists. Particularly as I now write on these feminists, I'm realizing how hard it is because we have not, you know, done the preservation work to hold on to those archives many times in many parts of the world. So the Global Feminisms archive gives us a resource that we otherwise would not have for the last twenty years. That is an extraordinary thing to have because it is a unique thing that we haven't, in fact, done in terms of preservation and keeping the legacy of these feminists who did so much work.

Maddie House: Thanks for sharing. And for our final question, I would love to hear any advice you have for others about pitfalls to avoid when using the Global Feminisms materials or any difficulties to watch out for.

Durba Mitra: I think, um, I wouldn't use the language of 'pitfall' because I think it is an extraordinary archive. But I do think the question is, how do you teach with materials when it requires so much expert knowledge or background information, you know, into particular feminist movements? Sometimes, you know, an interview will refer to contexts or events or moments that a student wouldn't be aware of. So, as a teacher, it's not a pitfall, but it just means that we, as people oriented towards justice, oriented at pedagogy, have to think about: how do we help students understand the context to best understand the voice, then, that is emerging that did this kind of feminist work?

Um, the second thing I would say is, of course, many of the interviews are long—understandably so—because these are people who've done a lot of good work in their life, and so trying to figure out highlights or figuring out ways, what should be used from the archive, has been an exciting experience for me, and so that's in some ways why I've had students choose themselves. The podcasts actually help introduce me to new

materials that are in the Global Feminisms archive, because, of course, I haven't heard everything in there. So if I have a student who's particularly interested in Polish feminism, you know, they do a podcast about it and I learn from the way they engage that archive. And I think that that is in some ways the best version of teaching is the version where we are collectively engaging how we're going to use the sources that we learn from. And so in the future, I can see myself doing more of that kind of collective work. I could see us doing a Wikipedia-thon where we use the archive to write Wikipedia entries. You know, there's many different ways that we can approach thinking with this archive to produce knowledge anew, and to produce teaching anew.

Maddie House: I think those thoughts and advice will be super helpful for our listeners. Dr. Mitra, thank you so much for joining us today.

Hanna Smith: Thank you again to Dr. Durba Mitra for sharing her time and experience with us today on the podcast. We know her insights will be valuable to instructors teaching both General Education courses and more specialized upper-level courses. We are inspired by her creativity in incorporating Global Feminisms Project materials into her course.

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.