

**GLOBAL FEMINISMS PROJECT
PODCAST SERIES:
CONTEXTUALIZING FEMINIST VOICES**

SITE: New Zealand

**Transcript of Nicky Newton
Interviewer: Abby Stewart**

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Intro: This podcast series, *Contextualizing Feminist Voices*, is designed to provide background information for people using the Global Feminisms Project website. The podcasts aim to provide users with a well-informed perspective on interesting aspects of the interviews from a particular country. For each episode one of the project staff interviews an expert on that country site.

Abby Stewart: Nicky, it's delightful to see you and we're so pleased that you're willing to record this set of comments about the New Zealand site, which is a really special site and I hope you're going to tell us a little bit about it. To start with, I'm going to ask you what are one or two themes that come up in the interviews that you think users — faculty, students, other people — should pay close attention to because those themes are particularly important in New Zealand's women's movement scholarship or activism?

Nicky Newton: I've got three themes, and I think the biggest, possibly, is the cultural theme. We have interviews from women of Māori descent (and those are the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa/New Zealand), but also Samoan, Pasifika, and South Asian Muslim descent — as well as Pākehā, or New Zealand European.

Historically, Māori women were property owners during colonial times when the idea that women couldn't own property was introduced to the country. So, that was unusual as far as Pākehā women were concerned. Also, Māori believe that within each person there is a male and a female side, to varying degrees, and that both are needed for the world to function. For example, they speak of an earth mother and a sky father. So, dominance and power issues, as well as attitudes towards trans people, are more complex within this cultural approach when it's layered with non-Māori, Western beliefs.

Back in the 1970s/1980s, although the Women's Movement was predominantly White, both Māori and Pākehā women recognized that Māori feminists needed to lead their own movement. That recognition (which might not have been quite as immediate among Pākehā women) was that their issues would be different and that their voices should be heard.

So, cultural identity comes up a lot within this group, more so among the Māori, Samoan/Pasifika, and Muslim interviewees. These interviewees expressed the need to know their cultural histories and stories, and to tell them, based on a sense of intergenerational knowledge-sharing. They mention appreciation for those feminists or previous generations who came before, but also the need to serve and support present and future generations of feminists. Both Pākehā and non-Pākehā women voiced appreciation for their earlier feminist colleagues. So, as you might imagine, storytelling also comes up a lot, particularly with the non-Pākehā/White interviewees. This is the idea of capturing people's stories, whether it's part of an oral tradition or a written tradition. This is also coupled with themes of data sovereignty for indigenous peoples, and Norie Ape, one of the interviewees in particular, is a strong advocate for data sovereignty.

The second theme, which is related to the first, has to do with intersectionality or diversity in feminisms. There's lots of discussion regarding intersectionality and the decolonizing of

feminism. Interviewees like Aleisha Amohia mention that reaching the goal of gender equity also includes incorporating all perspectives, such as disability and multiculturalism. There is also recognition by all participants — but again, perhaps more so among the non-Pākehā, non-Western feminists — that other countries do feminisms differently. The term “disrupter” comes up in the interviews quite a bit, sometimes as a consequence of feeling like an outsider — I’m thinking here especially of Anjum Rahman who speaks of finding her voice as a Muslim woman, as an immigrant Muslim woman, and not accepting being talked *about* but wanting to do the talking — but also in terms of giving voice to others by questioning where the power of a situation actually sits. Qiane Matata-Sipu summarizes this by saying she likes to “amplify the voices of marginalized people.”

The third theme I wanted to touch on is about Women’s Studies programs. Women’s Studies programs don’t exist as stand-alone programs in New Zealand, although they have done and were initiated — based on student demand — in the 1970s. They were phased out around 2010, and the Women’s Studies Association of New Zealand is currently winding up its operations. This isn’t to say there aren’t courses in Women’s and Gender Studies within different academic disciplines, however. Some interviewees addressed this as positive, some as negative. For example, on the positive side, one academic mentioned that the subject was intentionally broadened to reflect a wider approach to gender, that different departments now offer Gender Studies courses specific to their disciplines (so they’re incorporating gender into their disciplines), and that universities are hiring for positions in “Gender and... (some other discipline)”. On the negative side, university administrations were not supportive of dedicated Women’s Studies programs. The programs were then undermined, and now there is a lack of a central theory-driven department or school within the university context.

AS: Thank you so much, Nicky. Those are really important, and in some ways different from anywhere else within the Global Feminisms Project. Great to have you underscore those themes. What are one or two important things about feminist activism in New Zealand for people to keep in mind that are not covered in the written introductory information on the website?

NN: Yeah, okay. The first I’ll cover briefly is demeanor, or humor and recognition of many ways of activism. The New Zealand or Kiwi sense of humor is fairly self-deprecating, and the overall demeanor is one of self-effacement and informality, which sometimes takes a bit of getting used to. Also, while there was widespread recognition among the interviewee group that marching and visible forms of activism can be effective, there was also recognition of different grassroots approaches to action, and sort of backing off of that visible action. Ang Jury, who is the Chief Executive of the Women’s Refuge, talks about how to get things done — often the table-thumping or yelling approach didn’t work for her, and she humorously talks about needing to sort of ratchet back or temper her approach.

The second theme I wanted to touch on, and this is mentioned/touched on in the introduction to the New Zealand Global Feminisms site, is women and politics. So Aotearoa/New Zealand was the first country where women had the right to vote — and of course there’s a wide-spread sense of pride around that — but after winning the right to

vote in 1893, it took some time for further visible action to be taken. For example, women only won the right to run for Parliament or government in 1919 and the first woman was elected to Parliament in 1933. There's recognition that women's rights have advanced, but that there's still a lot of work to do in certain areas, such as, for example, family violence. Ang Jury again mentions that Aotearoa/New Zealand has one of the worst rates of family violence in the world.

Also, there's a number of interviewees who mention the idea of measuring New Zealand's progress towards gender equity by what's happening to women at the bottom — for example, working-class women, or single mothers on the poverty line — and that there's a need to focus on unpaid work. They mentioned that progress should not only be measured by the number of women we have in Parliament, or the fact that Aotearoa/New Zealand has had three women Prime Ministers or heads of state. One person commented that the earlier momentum of the Women's Movement needs to be revived, and required vigilance and innovation to do so, and I imagine this is the same in many countries — that the story isn't over yet and we need to address the certain things that need to be addressed.

AS: Absolutely. Thank you again. These are really important insights, and I so appreciate your willingness to engage in this podcast. It will be so helpful to our users.

NN: Totally my pleasure. Thanks for having me on.

Outro: Thank you for listening to this episode of *Contextualizing Feminist Voices* created by the Global Feminisms Project. The entire podcast team hopes it will help you understand and enjoy the materials on the website. If you liked this episode, check out the other podcasts in this series, as well as materials about countries, teaching resources, and interviews.