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Teaching and learning feminisms with Pacific Islanders: an emotional journey

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a feminist reflection of our experience teaching and learning feminisms with Pacific Islanders. We take as a starting point that feminism itself is encased in emotion. In the Pacific, some antagonise the term "feminism" as a foreign imposition and a "threat" to Pacific cultures. To others, feminism instils hope in the context of egalitarian aspirations framed within a development discourse. Some cautiously engage with feminist values, others embrace the notion passionately, generating multiple Pacific feminisms. Indirectly but instinctively, our approach to the teaching of feminism in this context has been to embark with students on a journey of experience and idea sharing and view it as an emotional journey. Acknowledging our positionalities, with their commonalities and differences, we examine the sentiments towards feminism embedded in postcolonial dynamics, as they manifest in our classrooms, and consider strategies for decolonial pedagogies of feminism.

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At heart, feminisms may be a call for social and political transformation, but the nature and purpose of those transformations are not the same across the globe. As politics "suffused with feelings, passions and emotions" (Gorton 2007, 333), the very sentiments in which feminist calls are encased equally require an understanding of their surrounding context. In postcolonial settings, scholars have emphasised the need to source the "features of feminisms" in local knowledge, practices, customs and norms, histories informed by the colonial experience and the resulting postcolonial landscapes (Gandhi 2006, Lugones and Spelman 1983; Menon 2000; Mohanty 1988; Sajed and Salem 2023; Trask 1996). These considerations inform our pedagogical practices around feminism as we engage with students from the Pacific region. In this paper, we are therefore interested in exploring and sharing how we teach and learn feminisms with Pacific Islanders as social actors in a postcolonial and development space, and the strategies that might be conducive to decolonial experiences more broadly. We ask these questions as a way of reflecting upon, and seeking to improve, our pedagogy, acutely aware that we are women who are not from the Pacific.

We take the opportunity to reflect on our collective pedagogy by comparing our approach to teaching at two distinct academic institutions, notably, the University of the South Pacific (USP), an intergovernmental institution bringing together 12 Pacific Island Countries (PICs), and the

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Australian National University (ANU). In the first institution, students explore "Contemporary Feminism: Theory, Methods and Debates". This is part of the postgraduate Gender Studies program that originated from regional gender stakeholders calling for sustained academic support in promoting gender equality, and within a larger USP commitment to the 2030 Sustainable Development goals as a member of the Council for Regional Organizations in the Pacific (CROP). The call required that the program be sensitive to the region's realities and needs, in adherence with the founding principles of USP as an institution "guided by Pacific values" and "shaping Pacific futures". In the second institution, the context is more explicitly addressed as students engage in a learning journey on "Pacific feminisms" housed within the Pacific Research Colloquium (PRC), offered by the Department of Pacific Affairs at the ANU. The PRC brings together early career researchers from the Pacific for an intensive workshop to develop skills for social science research. "Pacific Feminisms" is offered as an additional micro-credentialed course which can be credited towards academic programs at the ANU: the Graduate Certificate of Pacific Development and the Master of Pacific Development. Funded by the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the PRC, and its micro-credentials, are part of DPA's broader commitment to enhancing, and more broadly disseminating, Pacific research and knowledge.

In these learning settings, we are situated as lecturers who happen to share Italian backgrounds, although experienced in different settings (Italy for Domenica, and the Italian diaspora in Australia for Sonia), and have their own relations with gender, feminism, and the Pacific (which we share more explicitly below). Recognising the situatedness of feminist projects and more broadly the distinct relations with feminism that students and lecturers alike bring in, we have approached the courses as platforms for experience, perspective, and idea-sharing, placing the Pacific and its underlying postcolonial dynamics at the centre. In this space, we pay attention to and address the emotions that manifest within and around feminism in the region and use these emotions to shape the collective pedagogic journey.

Emotion has been a critical pedagogy in the teaching of feminisms for decades (Ahmed 2004; hooks 2000), and teaching feminisms in the Pacific instigates a specific set of emotions which requires careful, respectful navigation. The image of feminism as a foreign flower invoked by some in the region is representative of a wariness, underlined by perceived cultural and religious threats (Underhill-Sem 2010, 12). For others, feminism stirs different degrees of hope in the context of egalitarian aspirations framed within a development discourse, and/or larger notions of empowerment and liberation situated in de/anticolonial discourse. In this paper, we adopt feminist reflexive techniques – interrogating power relations with students and with bodies of knowledge, and reclaiming the importance of affect (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli 2012; Sampson, Bloor, and Fincham 2008) – to interpret and critically examine our experiences of *teaching and learning* feminism(s) with Pacific students over the past few years. We begin our reflection by considering the broader relationship between feminism and emotion, particularly in the pedagogical domain. We then contextualise this relationship to the Pacific, identifying the set of emotions that discussions of feminism have brought to theorising and practices in this region. In so doing, we recall our students' contributions to the classroom to ultimately reflect on (possible) strategies for decolonial pedagogies of feminism.

Feminism, emotion, and new knowledge

Emotion has been a signature driver of feminist thought and action (Ahmed 2004; Cvetkovich 1992; hooks 2000; Pedwell and Whitehead 2012; Stanley and Wise 1993). Scholars have previously articulated the importance of emotion – principally anger – in women's articulation of both the inherent challenges of patriarchy, and of their resolution. As Ahmed has written:

> it is not just that pain compels us to move into feminism – or compels feminism as a movement of social and political transformation. The response to pain, as a call for action, also requires anger; an interpretation that this pain is wrong, that it is an outrage, and that something must be done about it. (2000, 174)

Emotion would eventually be understood as a productive and constructive force in the establishment of new knowledge. This required serious contestation of a simplistic binary that pitted

emotion against thought and reason and resulted in feminist pleas being dismissed as "failing the very standards of reason and impartiality that [were] assumed to form the basis of 'good judgement'" (Ahmed 2000, 170). In her *Teaching to transgress*, bell hooks explains that new feminist knowledge was created in the 1970s through collaborative work in which women "were constantly in dialogue about ideas" (hooks 2000, 21). It was the collective *sharing* of emotion which prompted a revaluation of other modes of knowledge (Assiter 2000). Feeling for others transformed both individuals personally, but also their collectives: "in order to know differently we have to feel differently" (Hemmings 2012, 150). The criticality of emotion to the feminist cause was in its ability to motivate and inspire change. Anger, in particular, provided "grounds for a critique of the world" (Ahmed 2000, 171).

Whereas anger played a vital role in bringing feminists together, hope kept their political aspirations alive. Feminists are affectively moved to identify as feminists in order to change a particular politics. Indeed, it is the "question of affect – misery, rage, passion, pleasure – that gives feminism its life" (Hemmings 2012, 150). Feminists have used specific emotions to consider the past, and others to reimagine the future (Ahmed 2000, 183). More recent literature, however, cautions us to consider the intractable power of social norms, and our affective relationship to those norms (Åhäll 2018). Social transformation remains elusive precisely because of our affective attachment to the very norms which structure discrimination and prejudice. As Pedwell and Whitehead suggest, feminists need to engage more forcefully with the ways in which "feelings can (re)produce dominant social and geo-political hierarchies and exclusions" (2012, 120). We suggest this requires an analysis of a fuller gamut of emotions in specific contexts, including pedagogical ones.

The feminist movement grew through education – particularly in higher education classes – by legitimising students' and teachers' emotions in relation to patriarchy (Ahmed 2004; Boler 1999; hooks 2000). But even before the development of "women's studies" programs, hooks (2000, 19) points to the emancipatory power of women's groups, being those in which women collectively challenged patriarchy through their analysis of everyday sexism. These collectives restructured ideas and theories of what was, but also of what was *possible*. Perhaps not surprisingly, the pedagogic strategy of communal discussion continued into the higher education sector, with similar impact that continues across classrooms today. Rather than fighting emotion in the classroom, feminists embraced it. Challenging male domination through a reevaluation of patriarchal norms in private, personal arenas, such as the household, allowed for a subsequent analysis of those norms in public spaces as well, including as noted above, our affective attachment to those norms. Acknowledging that the "emotionality of feminist teaching" was regularly criticised and dismissed by faculty in other disciplines (see Boler 1999: xxiii, Kubala 2020, 184), Ahmed argues that emotions are essential to feminist pedagogy because they can "open up lines of communication" (2000, 182).

The use of emotions to build bridges and spaces for communication and sharing in the classroom thus becomes an increasingly important pedagogic strategy as ever more complex and sensitive questions are raised around the teaching and learning of feminisms, particularly in the context of theorisation and debates that have highlighted and challenged processes of exclusion and disempowerment within and through this movement (hooks 1984; Mohanty 1988). Yet, a crucial question remains with respect to the translatability of Western feminist, affective pedagogy in Pacific settings, and what is recognised as feminist knowledge. In postcolonial settings, pedagogic decolonisation norms and strategies have become useful in addressing power differentials in the dissemination and production of feminist knowledge, which are themselves connected to larger power differentials in knowledge (re)production within universities as Western-derived institutions:

> How do we attend to the delicate task of teaching and conceptualizing decolonial and transnational feminisms within institutions with colonial histories? How do we "decolonise" women, gender, and sexuality studies? How can we teach/learn gender and sexuality in or of the "Middle East"/"West Asia"? What/whose knowledges are shared? What is or should be front staged in our classrooms and what should be kept silent or back staged? (Dibavar 2023, 79)

The very act of raising these questions can unearth (negative) emotions associated with experiences of erasure, invisibility, and misrepresentation. Moreover, these questions can trigger reactions to the power dynamics that exist within different feminist platforms, feminist theory and action, and the teaching of feminism, as well as to tensions between communities and feminisms. Presenting the students as co-travellers in the learning journey which unfolds in a Canadian institution where the teacher is situated as a Canadian of Iranian origins, Dibavar emphasises the importance of collaboratively reflecting on notions like unlearning, un/mastery, and care and to share familiar stories that represent feminists and feminisms contextually and in all their complexity. While she does not explicitly acknowledge the role of emotions, her whole discussion revolves around them – hope, discomfort, despair – predominantly when she invokes "the practice in/of vulnerability" as a "a radical openness to the possibility of relearning from one another without having a set destination in mind" (2023, 79). In our view, this implies emotional exposure, courage, and resilience.

We therefore consider that the questions Dibavar raises can be extended to include the Pacific region. Addressing "Pacific silences", including emotional ones, has been at the core of those questions due to "the omission of Pacific thought in both feminisms and Indigenous feminist texts, the incorporation of the Pacific into the Asia-Pacific and […] building a definition of feminism in a certain way that forecloses the possibility of Pacific ontologies existing within feminisms" (Naepi 2018, 14). The first phenomenon echoes practices that have tended to mute or ignore Pacific voices in higher education (Naepi 2018, 15), and, more largely, scrap the Pacific Islands off the global map (Hau'ofa 1994). Pacific feminist theorisation and experiences have tended to be lost in the geographic construct of the Asia-Pacific (Hall 2009), and indeed, the more recent concept of the Indo-Pacific. Dynamics of exclusion and apparent incompatibility between being feminist and being Pacific have understandably translated into forms of rejection towards the label of "feminism" in the region. Still, "Pacific peoples located within the academy have begun to view feminism as having something to offer to wider Pacific theory and political movements" (Naepi 2018, 19).

A New Zealand-born Fijian feminist scholar, Naepi (2018) traces the core features of Pacific feminist theory in its decolonial critique of feminist theory, its emphasis on Indigenous ontologies revolving around collective worldviews and on the role of the ocean, and the connection between gender justice and climate justice. Naepi's description of her own journey into feminism via academia and of her ambition for the inclusion of Pacific feminist knowledge in teaching reveals tones of frustration, expectation, pride, and eventually hope, mirroring the rise of Pacific feminist knowledge among an increasing cohort of people embracing feminism, including through digital spaces, that act as communal platforms (Brimacombe et al. 2018).

Observations on postcolonial contexts and feminism, and the emotions those relations are wrapped in, should also be mindful of the influence of the development discourse and its relationship to Pacific engagement – and disengagement – with feminism. The notion of "development" has profoundly informed the conceptualisation and consolidation of Asia-Pacific as a geopolitical region (see Dirlik 1992). Pacific feminist knowledge may be situated within Indigenous feminisms, but it is also constructed in relation to "development feminism" (Alexeyeff 2020). By way of example, we refer to the recently completed, Australian Aid program entitled *Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development* which aimed – to varying degrees of success – to centralise the role of Pacific women in determining development outcomes in the region. And yet, part of the Pacific's antagonism towards feminist theory rests in its interpretation as another colonialist doctrine that would "save women" through development, and thereby deny "the ability of Pacific Islanders to "think for themselves"" (George 2010, 79), and reduce Pacific women to "passive victims" (Alexeyeff 2020). Even where the name of the program aimed to contradict this perception by emphasising Pacific Islander women's agency, several people continue to dismiss feminism as the donor's values and language, revealing discomfort and suspicion.

In the gender and development (GAD) context, culture, religion, and feminist discourse may be either perceived or implicitly suggested as antithetical (McPhillips 2002). Pacific feminisms articulated within the Indigenous feminist discourse bridge the alleged divide between culture and

feminism, as they theorise and formulate visions for the future around cultural notions and the spiritual and physical landscapes those are associated with. Other Pacific calls for/projects of transformations instead refashion feminist values and actions from a religious perspective (Douglas 2003); for instance, the Fijian religion-based project "House of Sarah" pursues the elimination of violence against women and girls, in collaboration with UN Women and with explicitly feminist local organisations, emphasising values associated with Methodist Christianity. The process of indigenisation across academia, which has facilitated the emergence of Indigenous feminist theory, has also contributed to the foothold of Indigenous Pacific feminist theory in academic teaching (Naepi 2018). Yet religiously informed forms of solidarity and advocacy, and the knowledge (and emotions) they come with, may still be rendered invisible as a secularised feminist discourse continues to dominate the development discourse, other than mainstream feminism (cf. Mahmood 2001).

Reminded of the call to reflect on the way emotions are managed in a classroom and channelled towards critical and creative outlets (Fendler 2003), we are interested in understanding and improving on our teaching and learning of feminisms with Pacific Islanders in a postcolonial and development context, and supporting the articulation of strategies that are more conducive to decolonial experiences. At this (albeit early) point in our collective pedagogic practice, we suggest three avenues: first, by engaging in feminist self-reflection with our students honestly and humbly; second, by building classroom climates that privilege emotion; and third, by creating the space in which students can express emotional responses to the texts we read, and the people we speak to. We further outline these below.

Emotionally reflexive engagement in the classroom

One answer may lie in the ability of all learners, including teachers, to engage reflexively with humility and honesty. New pedagogical theories encourage teachers to see their practice as being a two-way learning process. This is particularly relevant to the teaching and learning of feminisms, where it is important to come with a strong sense of humility, and not prejudge students' experience with or interest in the ideas. This approach, interestingly, is one we have found in common despite teaching in very different contexts and having each come to feminism through different pathways. Identifying our positionality in class has been a useful exercise, not only for students to understand their own relationship to ideas central to the feminist project – power, privilege, and relationality – but for us as teachers to be honest and frank with our students – and ourselves – on these issues. In this, we agree with Megan Boler (1999: xxiv) who encourages feminists to "bear witness" and examine our "ethical responsibilities through our own ethical self-reflection", without assuming an approving response from others.

In her reflections of positionality, Domenica presents as Mediterranean, Southern Italian, and of Catholic heritage. Born and raised in Reggio Calabria, a coastal town overlooking Sicily, she later "sailed off" to different places across Europe and in the Pacific, acknowledging having been facilitated by her EU passport. She explains that her parents, particularly her father, constantly affirmed that she should be an independent woman, presenting education, including learning English, as key to acquiring that status, and marriage and motherhood as secondary and optional experiences. She situates those aspirations in her regional context of economic underdevelopment and organised criminality, and in her family history, where her grandmothers are recalled for moral strength and hard work, but also class, rank and gender-based subordination. Her parents' expectations partly contrasted the larger cultural and religious fabric she was part of; still, some traditional gendered norms and practices shaped her upbringing. As an academic, Domenica approached gender in the discipline of cultural anthropology: her ethnography in Indigenous Māori contexts has focused on the masculinities produced in and around rugby within a larger analysis of postcolonial processes of inclusion and exclusion. Through her story, research and teaching, Domenica has developed an increased interest in the emotions and feelings informing gendered experiences. She shares not being used to speak of herself as feminist, and how she is still figuring out her own position within feminism.

Sonia, by contrast, has a more explicitly colonialist heritage which she has been mindful of sharing honestly with Pacific students. Born in Brisbane to Italian parents, Sonia reflects on the influence of a strongly patriarchal culture on her mother's side of the family which migrated to Australia from Eritrea, a former colonial state of Italy. In many ways, that patriarchal culture juxtaposed the more egalitarian – if not necessarily feminist – practice of her Milanese (Northern Italian) father. Both Sonia's parents were active members of the Italian diasporic community of Brisbane, and, like so many of their peers, keenly focused on creating a more prosperous life for their children in the face of everyday racism experienced as migrants in 1960s/1970s Australia. Against that backdrop, Sonia found a "spiritual home" in gender and politics studies at university – principally within the discipline of political science, but more recently in development studies – and has since channelled her career into supporting women in politics, particularly in parliaments. With a decade of experience working with Pacific women, she has seen her feminist practice consciously evolve, and adapt to Pacific cultural norms, in order to meaningfully connect. This has taken constant, active self-reflection.

Reflecting on our positionality with emotion in honest, humble ways exposes the privilege in our experience and highlights to the students our own awareness of that privilege. Our students' responses to our positionality have also been instructive. Domenica noted how some of her students have overtly expressed appreciation for being able to see her beyond the label of a "Western lecturer", or for not shying away from confrontational questions. Sonia noted students' increased engagement in discussions when she explicitly acknowledges her privilege and colonialist background. Moreover, it helps us to question how we teach and what we teach; to accept a much wider spectrum of emotion in the classroom. Positioning ourselves as equally vulnerable in our collective sense-making allows the students a sense of freedom to speak and share, to contribute/contest/embrace/reject ideas without fear of retribution. Both Domenica and Sonia have seen their classrooms erupt into tears and peals of laughter. The sense of safety in sharing these emotions is – at least in part – attributable to the honesty with which we position ourselves.

Establishing emotion-responsive class climates

Reyes et al. define emotional classroom climates as those with high "quality … social and emotional interactions in the classroom – between and among students and teachers … " (2012, 700). Teachers establish emotion responsive classroom climates when they are aware and sensitive towards the academic and emotional needs and perspectives of their students and show interest in them. The importance of creating a culture and climate in which students feel safe to share their emotions cannot be overstated. Gandhi's (2006) research has been useful in describing the role of emotions in bringing groups – such as student bodies – together, not only in opening communication, but in terms of challenging inbuilt power configurations so as to then challenge, provoke, and critique ideas and materials. When teaching and learning processes are able to balance different emotions, new ideas are generated, new rituals are established, new histories are written, new understandings of development, learning, and knowledge are created (Cheni, Grams, and Lund 2017, 3).

Acknowledging that the creation of emotion-responsive classrooms is far from easy, we have found empathy to be an important avenue, particularly as perceived white feminists engaging across cultural, ethnic, and racial privileges (see Mohanty 1988; Lugones and Spelman 1983). Feminists have previously employed empathy to challenge "the opposition between feeling and knowing, self and other" and to "foreground the importance of feeling as knowledge" (Hemmings 2012, 151). In postcolonial contexts, this helps to reassert the value of tacit knowledge over formal knowledge, Pacific feminist experiences over Western feminist experience. As Meyers (1994) suggests, from a feminist perspective, empathy may also be a condition of being understood as trustworthy by those within marginal communities used to being misrepresented. Yet empathy in the classroom is not merely "a natural skill", or a pedagogical tool crafted in mindless repetition; it is a politically astute, conscious struggle with discomfort that leads to deeper understanding and acceptance of "the other".

In this vein, and mindful of the multi-layered indoctrinations inherent in colonialism, our intention has not been to convert individuals to feminism. The Pacific Feminisms course at ANU has also avoided crowding its curricula with pre-determined content, contrary to the USP course, which was conceived as an overview of gender theory, different feminist perspectives, and feminist research practice through extensive use of literature. The two of us have, however, sought to "flip" the classroom (Nilson 2016) to give students agency in determining both the process and outcomes of the course, and to allow space for their own knowledge to guide the discussions.

Recently, Domenica opened her first class with a collage of personal photos displaying the natural landscape of her origins. That elicited anecdotes about her family across four generations, through which she concurrently painted a sociocultural, religious, economic and political landscape and a specific time in history. "Gender", in interaction with rank, class, and location, along stances towards power imbalances, subtly manifested in relations, practices, views, choices, possibilities, missed opportunities, and emotions. Domenica used her story to fully situate herself from the very beginning, as much as to orient students towards tapping into their own stories and the web of relations and the multi-layered context those are embedded in to "find" and reflect on gender and feminism and to position themselves vis-à-vis the course literature. In the classroom, Domenica provides initial prompts, acknowledging the intellectual and emotional spaces where students redirect the conversation, and supporting a creative approach. During assessed group work, students formally engage in storytelling, incorporating arts, religious and/or cultural references, and vernacular languages, to reflect on the notion of "Pacific women" and on Pacific Feminisms. Domenica's goal is to encourage a space where students may open up, acknowledge the different experiences and perspectives within the classroom, and navigate any arising discomfort as the class delves into the diversity and complexity of gendered experiences, relations, and power dynamics within the Pacific region and into the variety of Pacific feminist perspectives/perspectives on feminisms.

Sonia deliberately frames her course as a "research project" – an idea derived from Hollingsworth's (1994) argument that "reflective teaching is action research" because it represents more than critical thought; it represents "change as a result of that thought" (Hollingsworth 1994, 50). Sonia scaffolds her course with guest speakers – native Pacific Islanders who work in, or contest, ideas of feminism. Through conversations with these individuals – which Sonia represents to the students as "data collection exercises" – the course showcases the stories of various self-identified Pacific feminists – and sometimes non-feminists – revealing their triumphs and challenges in articulating and manifesting a vision of change in their own contexts. With these guests, students explore what Pacific feminisms are, and who might be a Pacific feminist, inherent tensions or opportunities for respect between Pacific cultures and feminism, including the foreignness of feminism, and feminism as a process of critical reflection.

An emotion-responsive classroom is one that works to minimise (if not equalise) power dynamics. In Pacific contexts, particularly those in which hierarchy structures most social relations and situations, this is rarely accomplished in just one class or module. It requires a concerted effort in which students are empowered to teach by sharing – emotions and experiences – and are recognised by peers and teachers as legitimate knowledge producers. For the feminist in the Pacific, this – perhaps controversially – also means including those who may not openly see themselves as feminists.

Encouraging emotive responses to Pacific feminisms

A final strategy involves the sharing of emotions in the classroom (Cheni, Grams, and Lund 2017; Gandhi 2006). In our courses, students regularly point out tensions towards feminism within their communities, often rooted in distrust towards development practices, and sometimes in their own family. Some students are proud and engaged feminists; others hesitate at calling themselves feminist, if not clarifying that they are not feminists, but willing to learn more about the movement

and some gender-related issues. These students are often engaging in gender-related studies as part of their upskilling for their jobs in government and development-related organisations or may be addressing gender-related issues within faith-based spaces.

These tensions reported in the classroom manifest within the learning space itself through a critical reading of, and engagement with, Pacific and non-Pacific feminist texts. In this critical engagement, emotion surfaces. We see, for example, an emotive driver of Pacific feminism represented as *hostility* – as distinct from anger – and more specifically, a hostility towards the assumption that Western feminism could be uncritically applied in Pacific contexts. There is an important value in not only recognising this deep-seated hostility towards Western feminist ideas in the Pacific, but also unpacking the reasons for that hostility within the classroom, even more so when the teachers may be seen as embodying that Western dimension. Scholars have suggested this hostility towards feminisms sprung from its association with colonisation (Griffen and Yee 1989; Marsh 1998; Jolly 2005). As early as 1978, at the First National Conference of Vanuaaku Women of Efate, Grace Mera Molisa had identified "women's liberation" as "a European disease to be cured by Europeans" (cited in Tusitala Marsh 1998). Molisa argued that this kind of liberation did not extend far enough; liberation from colonisation would be, in her words, "a total liberation. A social, political and economic liberation". And yet the feminist fight in the Pacific was not the same:

> It took me many years – maybe, about 10 years – before I began to understand that the white woman's feminism, the First World woman's feminism, if you will, was a feminism that came out of their personal experience. They did not have to live in extended families or have to fight colonialism, imperialism, cultural imperialism and dominance in the way that we had to. They did not have such a dramatic presence of the church and religion in their lives. Their personal experiences from which their feminism came was different from my personal experience. (Griffen and Yee 1989, 9)

Reading and engaging with this hostility is useful in our classrooms because it has provided our students with its own form of liberation; liberation from preconceived ideas of what feminism might look like in contemporary Pacific landscapes, and who might be considered a feminist in those contexts. Students understand immediately that they do not need to "look like" other feminists, or even like other feminists.

Identifying, and naming, that hostility has also been useful in exploring the relationship of feminism to key aspects of Pacific culture, and as a mechanism for student-initiated *rapprochement* with the label. Seminal Pacific feminist texts, for example, have highlighted for our students the link between hostility towards Western feminism and its perceived threat towards Pacific cultures and religion, most particularly, towards women's traditional power source, the family (Marsh 1998, 671). Again, Vanessa Griffen's research highlighted Pacific women's reluctance to be associated with (some) Western feminists' disavowal of motherhood:

> … "feminists" do not want babies and yet women's lives are defined in terms of their children. Some respondents did not want to have anything to do with women who wanted to live only with other women, or who rejected the family. In their view, the base of women's lives was the family. (Griffen and Yee 1989, 8)

Embracing this kind of feminism would have denied a cornerstone of Pacific women's legitimate cultural and social capital. More broadly, Western feminism failed to resonate with the reality of (many) Pacific women's lives. Whereas Western feminism was seen as an individualistic pursuit, Pacific women's movements stressed community and gender complementarity (Jolly 2005, 139). Thus, for feminism to find meaning in the Pacific, it has needed to capture and process its difference from the "foreign", that is, from the colonial. Indeed, encouraging emotional responses to these texts has supported some of our students' own exploration of the source of their personal – and communities' – resistance to the label.

Hesitations point to a second, no less important, emotive driver of Pacific feminisms that might be identified in the feeling of *caution*. Nicole George's doctoral research with Fijian feminists in the early 2000s uncovered their "unease" with the term feminism, noting that the label would "lead men to brush you aside" and was seen as a "form of extremism" (George 2010, 79). Caution allowed Pacific

women, strategically perhaps, to work through their engagement with the concepts and ideas on their own terms, formulating their own responses to social issues that affected women in the region within distinctive religious or cultural values, and determining which imagery and terminology was most constructive in those contexts. Tusitala Marsh captured this as "painful", but productive work:

> Feminism had to painfully filter through my many selves as: daughter, sister, wife, Pacific Islander, New Zealander, woman, heterosexual, working class, Christian, student […]. By integrating aspects of feminism and applying it alongside cultural issues, a more holistic analysis is created where the complexity of relationships are not overshadowed by antagonistic gender relationships. (Marsh 1998, 674)

Pacific women's hostility and caution – their "very real suspicion of feminism" (Marsh 1998, 665) – supported the articulation of a new set of values and emotions that found resonance and legitimacy in Pacific cultures. Alongside hostility and caution, however, Pacific feminisms have also been driven by *hope* and *passion*. In her reflection on two Pacific feminists' work (Nabulivou and Hall), Sereana Naepi considers feminism as a "positive influence" (2016: 4). Where Nabulivou celebrates the inspirational role that feminism has played in the lives of her greatest influences (Nabulivou 2006, 31), Hall appreciates feminism's "integral" role "to the process of decolonization for Hawai'ian and other indigenous women" (Hall 2009, 16). Naepi's optimism, while not necessarily tempered, does come with expectation, as she explores the potential for feminism to learn from her Pacific community and values. Like Tusitala Marsh, Naepi arrives at hope by reconciling feminism with her own Pacific values. In her case, however, feminist hope exists in the ocean:

> [The ocean] is how I understand Pacific responses to feminisms; there are some knowns (few voices), many unknowns (as there are still silences), the tides change (there is no consensus on the role of feminisms), but if we read the signs right we maybe able to navigate this space in a way that benefits women of the Pacific and perhaps provides teachable moments for others. We can also take this metaphor one step further, if the ocean is Pacific feminisms then what is the land? For me the land is feminist theory, it seems like it has always been there and always will be, there are theoretical cliffs that cannot be scaled, and mountains that catch the rain or have snow melt to form rivers that feed the ocean. I can exist on land, I can exist with feminist theory, the rivers that form in the mountains of feminist theory and feed the ocean can influence my understandings of feminisms. At the same time the ocean (Pacific feminisms) can lap against the insurmountable cliffs (feminist theory) changing the face of feminist theory and sometimes even causing the cliffs to collapse. It is my hope that we will recognize the ability of the ocean to change landscapes either through a slow and patient lapping of water against cliffs, or through a tsunami of thought that clears the land and offers a chance for new growth. (Naepi 2016, 5)

The forms of reconciliation between feminism and Pacific histories, experiences, values, and aspirations, which we acknowledge and encourage in our classrooms, pave the way to subtler Pacific silences, as discussion delves into deeper analysis of the Ocean and its many unknowns. Students manifest a variety of emotional states – embarrassment, reluctance, pain, frustration, enthusiasm, or surprise – when the attention is shifted to power differentials amongst women in the region; when trying to place Pacific masculinities and gender and sexual diversity in the discussion; and, more largely, while exploring how colonial legacies shine through local gendered experiences.

In Domenica's course, for instance, a significant number of students are Fijians of Indian ancestry. While Indo-Fijian women have played an active role in the history of feminism in Fiji and the region (Emde 2018; Mishra 2008), their unique experiences, informed by distinct sociocultural and religious framings and their status as an ethnic minority largely descending from Girmitiyas (Indian indentured labourers), may not easily emerge. Over the years, a few of Domenica's Indo-Fijian female students have presented moving poems, capturing their distinctive stories, while asserting belonging and claiming recognition as Pacific women. Similarly, unveiling the experiences and aspirations specific to Indo-Fijian non-heteronormative people, and even more considering the non-hegemonic status of Indo-Fijian masculinities in the nation, may elicit awkwardness.

Fijian markers of hereditary, chiefly status, like Ratu (for male) and Adi (for female), regularly feature in the list of course participants, reminding rank is key to understanding social relations – hence, how gender is constituted – in Indigenous Fijian settings, and indeed other Indigenous Pacific spaces. The status conferred by family lineage, chiefly title, being from the village or married into the village, may play out in the stories and reflections of several Indigenous Fijian students, and students from other Indigenous Pacific communities alike. The impact of the gender and development discourse, where gender as a category of identity has been isolated from social class, rank, and kinship (Alexeyeff 2020), and the importance those other categories yet hold in Pacific social formations, make the analysis of their interrelatedness, including the recognition of resulting power and subordination, a complex and sensitive process, where students tread carefully.

Recognition of the way Pacific women may be filtered through racialised canons leads students to address the legacy of colonial representations exoticising fairer South-eastern Pacific women and of Western political geography that crystallised the Southwest Pacific as "dark" through the notion of Melanesia. Indo-Fijian students more often than not voice frustration acknowledging how colourism is equally part and parcel of Indo-Fijian women's experiences, testifying to the persistence of caste-based markers. While Domenica's students across the region may trace new connections to Black Feminism, which is part of their curriculum, all of these discussions may provoke bitterness.

As categories of locality and disability acquire visibility in Pacific development practice and feminism, our students have begun to passionately engage in the examination of the power imbalances between urban women and women in rural/remote locations and of the intersection of ableism and gender discrimination. Unpacking the distinct nuances that the "Indigenous women" label may acquire across the region as the result of distinct colonial experiences, and how these generate forms of separation other than shared interests, may be more emotionally challenging. For those located in sovereign Pacific Island countries, that entails reflecting on the extent to which sovereignty translates into independence. In one offering of Domenica's course, a few of her students dived further into the ocean, expressing mixed-emotions as they highlighted what they perceived as increased opportunities and privileges for Pacific women raised in diasporic spaces in the Global North, educated in Global North institutions, or holding Global North passports – all the while a Fijian-born student who had been raised and achieved a degree in the USA and settled back to Fiji timidly shared experiencing her Northern American accent as a hindrance to her belonging and inclusion as a Pacific woman.

Encouraging class consideration of the place of Pacific men and analysis of Pacific masculinities as postcolonial masculinities, which includes pondering the place of colonial violence, tends to be welcomed as novel and met with enthusiasm. Conversely, the inclusion of Pacific gender and sexual minorities and their place in Pacific feminism in the discussion produces mixed emotional responses, amidst discourses that present queer discrimination as a colonial hangover or, vice versa, argue that gender and sexual diversity has never existed in their societies or collides with their religious beliefs.

Ultimately, the many leaps our students take into the Ocean in our classrooms are practices of vulnerability harbouring opportunities for additional forms of liberation, which may contribute to the total liberation Molisa called for. Empathy has become a pivotal tool by which our students acknowledge their respective walks of life and the perspectives, opportunities, disadvantages, choices, and aspirations those walks shape. In this sense, students achieving or nurturing empathy towards gender-related experiences and perspectives/approaches to feminism has implicitly become a learning outcome of our courses.

Conclusion

In 2022, when we were introduced to each other by a postgraduate student as scholars both teaching feminism courses with Pacific Islanders, we immediately entered a space of exchange and reflection, addressing our pedagogical practices, positionalities, course content, experiences with students, and what we have been learning about feminism in the Pacific and from the classroom. The first time we

formally shared our reflections at the State of the Pacific 2022 Conference, we framed our presentation as a conversation. We were (perhaps unsurprisingly, given our heritage) embroiled in the emotions of the exchange, which reverberated with the emotions we were navigating in our respective courses, and in the realisations and possibilities that were manifesting. Mindful of our own positionalities, we have been asking ourselves how to further attenuate the tensions inherent in exploring feminism with Pacific Islanders in a context where feminist aspirations are co-opted in development agendas and feminism may be a site to conceptualise and enact projects of decolonisation.

In the case of USP, the development frame is blatant, given the university presents itself as a development agent and the course is part of a program which is the pinnacle of the university commitment to gender mainstreaming. The course is on feminist theory in general and connected to the gender and development course, and the classroom has been strategic in centering the Pacific, with students providing contextualised "course material" through their own experiences and knowledge. Ironically perhaps, at ANU, there is more space for decolonising, if by that we mean Pacific perspectives, experiences and theory become visible/are recognised, as the course explicitly focuses on *Pacific* feminisms and deliberately privileges the voices of Pacific women. At the same time, Australia plays a key role in terms of encouraging and funding gender mainstreaming work in the Pacific Islands and with Pacific Islanders. As teachers, both of us have instinctively responded to these teaching contexts by embarking with students on an emotional journey of experience and idea sharing, which on reflection, might itself be expression of feminism as a political call for transformation encased in emotion. After nearly a year of reflexive conversations, we have come to realise that we our exchange can be reflected meaningfully into the following changes to our courses.

The course taught by Domenica was conceived as foundational to the gender studies program at USP and meant to support the adoption of feminist knowledge in research. With the further development of the program, including a gender studies research and methodologies course, Domenica had already planned to remove the methodological component to enable more space and time for students to engage and sit with feminist perspectives on gender and power. Our discussion directed her towards proposing further changes, which aim to foreground the Pacific, as much as the emotions that inform feminist knowledge and its (re)production. To start with, Domenica proposed the inclusion of Pacific in the course name and an increased presence of Pacific literature. She then proposed to refashion the course structure so as to encourage a deeper engagement with the way decolonial aspirations and development pursuits shape local understandings of and approaches to "gender" and "feminism". The proposed revisions entail a more explicit acknowledgement of the Western genealogy of gender theory, paralleled by a stronger attempt at decentralising such genealogy. They equally provide more space to analyse the relation between religion and feminism, including feminist theology and local faith-based approaches, and consider sport-based approaches to feminist ambitions, which are increasingly visible and strong in the Pacific region. Within the revised course, the sentiments informing different stances to and within feminism can be given more structured attention. Having been approved, these changes will be implemented in 2024.

Sonia, in considering the next iteration of the Pacific Feminisms course, would like to add a module that focuses on emotions and their instructive role in defining attachment and/or resistance to exogenous and endogenous feminist theories, debates, and ideas in Pacific contexts. A dedicated module on emotions might help the classroom to acknowledge the origins and contemporary relevance of hostility and hope embedded in Pacific explorations of feminist language and goals, and to collectively identify opportunities and strategies by which to navigate those emotions. It might also explore the power of collectively and individually situated/constructed emotions in shaping our perception of foreign and indigenous feminist ideas, and our reflections and responses to those explicitly articulated emotions.

In both cases, ideally, these changes will represent a step forward in decolonising classroom discussions of feminism in Pacific contexts and in opening safe spaces for the contestation or acceptance of new and old ideas about power, society, and gender.

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