

A History of Fijian Women's Activism (1900-2010)

Abstract

Fijian women collectively challenged their double colonization since the 1900s. Indentured women workers pioneered 'embryonic agitations' (evidenced through strikes, physical confrontations and written petitions) against exploitative colonial officials and Indian overseers. The 1920s saw a shift in the nature of women's activism towards a discourse of economic empowerment, with the rise of indigenous, organic, organizations like Qele ni Ruve. This was followed by the transcultural platform of the Pan-Pacific and Southeast Asian Women's Association in the 1940s and the contemporary women's movement of the 1960s led by the Fiji Young Women's Christian Association. The latter was marked by convergences with and divergences from transnational discourses. The focus-feminisms of the 1980s brought human rights to the forefront of women's activism. This has continued until the present day, although there is now an emphasis on peace and reconciliation in post-coup Fiji.

Situating Fijian Women's Resistances

Shameem suggests that the Fijian¹ women's movement developed in a lateral fashion, sometimes receding into conservatism then jumping in a very radical way.² She explains: 'its articulation was at different levels depending on what else was going on'³ in the country, the region and the world. Following Shameem, this article situates the multiple resistances of Fijian women within an intricate historical, socio-cultural, economic and political milieu.⁴ It will argue that each stage of Fijian women's organizing was distinct, depending on intersections with global, regional, and national networks, discourses and

historical circumstances. Some introductory remarks on Fijian history are necessary to situate this discussion.

The Fiji Islands comprise some three hundred and thirty islands in the Southern Pacific Ocean. Prior to colonization, indigenous Fijian societies were based on the principle of patrilineal agnatic descent.⁵ Indigenous Fijians belonged to a *yavusa* (clan), consisting of several *mataqali* (family groups). The tribal hierarchy comprised chiefs and executives of the *mataqali*, masters of ceremony, priests and warriors.⁶ Indigenous Fijian women were excluded from this hierarchy and also from decision-making processes in the public sphere (unless they were chiefly women or *Adi's*). Their primary roles, like that of women from other tribal societies, included gathering wild fruit, plants and medicinal herbs, fishing, minding the children and the elderly and making handicrafts like pottery and mats.⁷ With the arrival of European explorers and missionaries in the 1600s, and later the British colonizers, the traditional roles of women (and men) began to change to accommodate the pressures of an 'intensive political and commercial contact'.⁸

When Fiji was ceded to Britain on 10 October, 1874, the first Governor General, Sir Arthur Hamilton Gordon, introduced a system of 'indirect rule' designed 'to protect native institutions and develop the capacities of the people for the management of their own affairs'.⁹ In line with this policy, Indigenous Fijians were confined to their villages and restricted from participating in commercial labor. The colonial government's demand for cheap labor led to the transportation of approximately 68,480 Indian indentured laborers (*girmitiyas*) to Fiji, of which 13,696 were female and 54,784 were

male.¹⁰ Throughout the indenture period (1879-1920), female laborers were subjected to squalid living conditions, domestic violence, lack of privacy, rape and sexual assault by overseers, long hours of work on the plantations and wage cuts for low attendance during sickness and pregnancy.¹¹ These experiences of oppression and repression resulted in the formation of the Indian Women's Committee in the early 1900s.

During the colonial period, Fijian society was deeply segregated. Europeans insisted on social separation from Fijians and Indians.¹² Government aided schools were strictly reserved for children of full European parentage. This was reinforced by discrimination in other areas of life in the colony, for instance, the European minority used zoning regulations to create exclusive residential enclaves.¹³ De Ishtar contends: 'From the beginning of the colonization process, the state acted to define people by ethnicity'.¹⁴ Although this divisiveness impacted greatly on women's organizing, particularly in ensuring separate organizations of indigenous Fijian and indentured women, white women frequently transcended these boundaries. In 1924, for example, they initiated the formation of the largest association of indigenous Fijian women, *Qele ni Ruve*.

Post-indenture women's organizations arose out of the social, cultural and political reformism that was taking place in Fiji in the 1930s. During this period, women's agitations captured the shift in the physical and mental 'space' of a select group of Indo-Fijian women from the public (political and economic) and private (domestic) sphere to the private sphere exclusively, or from the status of worker and wife/mother to that of wife/mother. As Indian women settled into their new lives as lower middle-class women,

they attempted to reclaim or regain the *izzat* or self-respect. Organizations like the *Arya Samaj*, comprising wealthy and educated Fiji Indians and teachers and missionaries from India, were established for this purpose. As Kelly notes: ‘The *Samaj* members were articulate in vernacular discourse and had by far the largest membership of any Indian organization, other than the Indian Reform League, that was articulate in English and effective in colonial, legal and social speech genres’.¹⁵ Small pockets of women’s organizations such as the *Gujarati Women’s Association* and the *Indian Women’s Society of Suva* emanated from the reformism of these larger organizations.

The 1960s was an important time for Fijian women. Women (and men) were granted the right to vote in 1963.¹⁶ The South Pacific’s first regional university, The University of the South Pacific (USP), was established in Suva in 1968. Member countries included: Samoa, Tonga, Kiribati, Vanuatu, Niue, Cook Islands, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, and Nauru. In addition to giving rise to opportunities for women wishing to pursue tertiary studies, this institution served as an important mouth-piece for debates surrounding women’s liberation in Fiji and the Pacific. In the late 1960s, women began to assert that despite social, cultural and geographical differences, Pacific Island societies were predominantly patriarchal and women were often seen as secondary to men. Their struggle for equality was located within experiences of colonialism, questions concerning land rights, environmental concerns and other political and social factors.¹⁷ The establishment of the *Fiji Young Women’s Christian Association* (hereafter referred to as the *Fiji Y*) in the mid 1960s fostered these struggles.

The rise of rights-based discourses in the 1980s led to the emergence of organizations like the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement and Women's Action for Change. During this period, a significant landmark for Fijian women was the ratification of the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on 28 August, 1995. In 2002, several Non-Governmental Organizations in Fiji worked together to translate CEDAW into Fijian and Hindi.¹⁸ The translated document, distributed to women from rural and urban areas, marked a significant attempt to localize and nationalize an international convention.

Ethnic tensions in Fiji, resulting in a series of coups, have impacted greatly on Fijian women's activism. The first coup, headed by Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka on 14 May, 1987 was closely followed by another takeover and the abrogation of the 1987 Constitution;¹⁹ the second coup, initiated by businessman and nationalist, George Speight, on May 19, 2000;²⁰ and the 2006 coup led by Commodore Frank Bainimarama, Commander of the Fiji Military Forces, have (directly and indirectly) resulted in an exacerbation of discrimination against women.²¹ Jalal comments on the impact of the 2000 coup on Fijian women: 'All reform bills and other lobbying towards equality for women have been obstructed, judicial processes have been chaotic, poverty in general has increased and democracy has been partially subverted'.²² I will now consider each of these phases of Fijian women's activism in some depth, beginning chronologically with indentured women.

Embryonic Agitations

The Indian Women's Committee

The Indian Women's Committee (colloquially called 'the women's gang') provided a platform for indentured women to present their grievances and oppose their maltreatment by a male dominated British colonial administration.²³ In the late 1800s and early 1900s, this committee punished European and Indian men who sexually and/or physically violated women. These acts of punishment may be interpreted as reactions to women's dehumanization as victims of a system created by (white, male) colonialists as well as to the oppression(s) inflicted on them by patriarchies in general. Naicker, an indentured laborer from Fiji, describes how the Indian Women's Committee militantly confronted men who exploited them:

Usually the planter or overseer succeeded in seducing the women they wanted but sometimes everything did not go too well... The women's gang would catch the person concerned unaware and beat him up. They would strike him to the ground and thrash him as well as do more nasty things.²⁴

The latter included pinning an overseer down and taking turns to urinate on him. On one occasion, the women's gang made a line and walked over the overseer until he excreted.²⁵ Not unusually, Naicker concludes: 'The person taking liberties over the lives of indentured women usually lost their life'.²⁶ What was particularly notable about the acts of the 'women's gang' was that 'women drew men into the orbit of plantation resistance',²⁷ thus highlighting the necessity of situating certain resistances within experiences of colonialism – as – indenture.

The second type of protest mounted by the Indian Women's Committee involved politically confronting the colonial administration. Resistances against the low wages and the high cost of living in Fiji in the 1920s were headed by Jaikumari Manilal, a *satyargarha* activist trained at Gandhi's *ashram* (temple) in Gujarat, India and wife of Doctor Manilal Maganlal, Fiji's first Indian barrister.²⁸ Jaikumari's role in the 1920 strike involved writing petitions against the low wages and high cost of living and organizing meetings and demonstrations. She also led a deputation of women, who presented the original 1920 strike demands to the Governor, petitioning for a higher wage and official inquiry into high food prices.²⁹ In this sense, Jaikumari was the agency that threatened the colonial order. She was also a source of inspiration for other indentured laborers, namely, Fulquhar, Rahiman, Rachel, Sonia and Mungri. I wish to reflect briefly on the riot led by indentured women on 11 February 1920.

The cover story in *The Fiji Times and Herald*, headlined 'Indian Riot: Women the Cause',³⁰ describes a group of frenzied, kava-drinking, veiled women, attacking and beating up colonial officials with *doga* sticks: 'Mr. Swinbourne found sticks and stones flying and special constable Reay being driven back. Mr. Reay was holding Rhaiman and several women were using *doga* sticks on him. They were shouting "hit, beat, kill... Mr. Savage was also beaten by two other women'.³¹ While these representations highlight how patriarchal discourses reinforced negative and stereotypical images of indentured women, they still capture the activism of this group of women and their engagement in national political debates. Furthermore, they demonstrate that as indentured women played a critical dual role as economic actors in the sugar industry (wage earners) and as

mothers and wives, they simultaneously questioned exploitative or oppressive state policies that impinged on the livelihood of their families in the private sphere.

Not surprisingly, as it is with most patriarchally threatening organizations, ‘backlashes’ are likely to occur. Indeed, the action taken by the British colonial government in March 1920 clearly attempted to retract and contain women’s agency and activism. The Colonial Secretary’s Office Manuscript offers the following account in 1934: ‘The strike action was so powerful that the Governor had to call for military help from the Australian and New Zealand Navy. With this back-up, government officials were able to use force to subdue the strikers’.³² A significant outcome of the backlash was that the main arena for women worker’s articulations was destroyed and Jaikumari Manilal was deported for instigating the Cost of Living Strike and organizing women into protest groups. The other women under her leadership were imprisoned.³³ However, this was not the end of Indian women’s activism. Rather, it was the beginning of what Shameem calls the ‘Reformist Indian Feminist Movement’ of the late 1920s and early 1930s.³⁴

The Indian Women’s Society of Suva

The Indian Women’s Society of Suva (later renamed *Stri Sewa Sabha*) was founded in 1934 by educated and wealthy middle-class Hindu, Muslim and Gujarati women. In line with the post-indenture reformism that was taking place during this period, women from this society attempted to alleviate poverty by fundraising to feed the needy and destitute and encouraging women to flexibly combine domestic work with income-generating activities such as sewing or cooking. Economic empowerment was the cornerstone of

women's activism during this period. Left wing activist, Moore, summarizes the relationship between women's economic empowerment and women's oppression: 'Unless women are economically independent, they cannot remove themselves from violence and related issues. Women's rights are about economic rights'.³⁵ To put this argument differently, 'economic activity is the key to improving women's status.'³⁶

In addition to empowering women economically, the Indian Women's Society of Suva played a critical role in lobbying government to change marriage laws for Indians in Fiji. Kelly states that the 1916 Marriage Bill was controversial because colonial authorities opted to keep 'Indian custom' out of marriage laws in Fiji. 'Administrators readily codified versions of indigenous Fijian custom as laws but refused to grant legitimacy or authority to the customs of Indians that came to Fiji as 'coolies' and plantation labor units'.³⁷ Practices like child marriage, polygamy and bride selling were not accepted as valid forms of Indian custom, neither were they recognized in Fiji's laws. In 1916, the British colonial administration sought to end what was termed 'irregular marriages' by implementing laws that required all marriages to be registered and all practicing priests to obtain licenses. The colonial Government of India opposed this bill and insisted that non-registered marriages should not be punishable by law and that legal standing should be given to 'the personal law' of the parties to be married.³⁸

Women from the *Sabha* established national networks with other social and religious bodies such as the Indian Reform League to oppose marriage laws that would contribute further to the oppression of women. White women (Miss. L. Pearce, Mrs. B. Pearce, and

Miss Griffen) and indigenous Fijian women (Mrs. Navagi) joined with women from the *Sabha* to lobby for some very important reforms.³⁹ In an interview held with the Governor on 30th August 1934, Miss Griffen accompanied by Mrs. Mure Khan and Mrs. Elahi Ramjam (from the *Sabha*) requested the government to make a provision for checking the age of girls for whom a marriage license is issued⁴⁰ and raise the minimum legal age of marriage for Indian girls from thirteen years to sixteen years. The same delegation proposed that nursing opportunities be opened up for Indian women so that they could earn an income and attain economic independence from men. While nursing reinforces women's roles as care-givers and nurturers in a patriarchal context, the proposition that women should work outside the home was a stepping-stone for Indian women in view of the reformism that was taking place. In particular, there was a clear acknowledgment that women should be allowed to transcend the private sphere. These efforts to lobby government may be classified as 'political agitations' by (middle-class) women to improve the situation of other women in the country. I will now turn to the role played by white women in the formation of women's organizations in Fiji.

White Women in Fiji

Knapman asserts that: 'White women taught indigenous Fijian and Indian women values that contributed to their progress in a capital driven economy that began to emerge in the nineteenth century'.⁴¹ She elaborates: 'White women opened their homes to Fijians and took responsibility for Fijian women; a responsibility which for many involved learning the language, dispensing medicine, nursing the sick, teaching, demonstrating considerable bravery and establishing genuine relationships'.⁴² They also fostered craft-

making and introduced indigenous Fijian women to so-called ‘modern’ or ‘western’ domestic skills.⁴³ Scholars writing on women in the Pacific contend that such ‘native agency’ was encouraged by missionaries and the colonial state to ‘uplift’ or ‘improve’ indigenous women.⁴⁴ While there is some truth in these claims, white women played a significant role in educating girls in Fiji.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Conference of Women Workers emerged in Suva to facilitate this objective. Members of this organization were all practicing Christians who were involved in mission charity and education work. Included in the organization’s membership were well known educators and advocates for the education of girls, namely, Miss Weston, Miss Cark, Miss Griffen and Miss Hames. Among other concerns, the Conference of Women Workers focused on educational matters and offered opinions for consideration by the government. During their 1926 Annual Conference, the women advised that: ‘a school for girls should be opened but that this could only offer part-time education in order to attract a greater number of girls whose mothers would permit them to attend classes for shorter hours’.⁴⁵ Rather than being a working women’s union (which was the tradition of worker’s movements globally),⁴⁶ this organization focused primary on legislating for the educational empowerment of girls.

Qele ni Ruve (Soqosoqo Vakamarama)

White women also played a significant role in the formation of Fiji’s largest organization of Indigenous women, *Qele ni Ruve*, in 1924. This organization was founded in 1924 by Ruby Derrick, wife of the principal of Lelean Memorial School at the time.⁴⁷ In her

honor, the organization was given its name. *Qele* is defined as a cluster, shoal, swarm or group,⁴⁸ *ni*, a preposition signifying possession,⁴⁹ and *Ruve*, the Fijian equivalent of ‘Ruby’ which incidentally is also, the term used to describe ‘a white-throated pigeon’.⁵⁰ I suggest that this ‘group belonging to Ruby’ be read figuratively as a symbol of the extension of the British Empire where the power and ownership resided with the colonizer (in this case, a woman). After Ruby (or *Ruve*) retired, the leadership of the organization was taken over by chiefly indigenous Fijian women who renamed it the *Soqosoqo Vakamarama* (SSV). *Soqo* is defined as ‘to gather or assemble’,⁵¹ *vaka* is a prefix⁵² and *marama* means ‘a lady’.⁵³ When the leadership and name of the organization changed, its agency and ownership shifted from one group of privileged women to another – from the colonial ladies to the indigenous Fijian chiefs or *Adis*. Here, women of chiefly rank participated in what may be termed a ‘neo-colonial endeavor’ as they strove to teach women how to sew, cook (the European way), learn traditional handicraft skills, keep their homes and villages clean and generally, to bring up healthy families.⁵⁴ In the paragraphs that follow, I will examine some of the criticisms surrounding the leadership, platform and activities of the *Soqosoqo Vakamarama*.

Aside from its reinforcement of traditional, hierarchical structures and its perpetuation of the status quo,⁵⁵ this national organization, currently under the wing of the Ministry of Fijian Affairs, has come under further scrutiny for its close association with the churches in Fiji, especially the Methodist church. Norton describes this relationship: ‘The SSV works closely with Christian denominations, especially the Methodist church and many SSV members are also members of women’s organizations in the churches, such as

Soqosoqo Veitokani ni Marama ni Lotu Wesele (Women's Fellowship in the Methodist Church'.⁵⁶ She critiques SSV, arguing that it expects its members to attend to traditional duties of the *vanua* (land/community), church and state. Norton concludes that women from such organizations are still excluded from decision-making processes at the community level and 'in its present form it [SSV] is certainly not an effective organization for promoting development'.⁵⁷

Moreover, SSV has been further accused of advancing Indigenous Fijian nationalism in post-coup Fiji as its members endorsed the platform of Indigenous Fijian nationalist parties.⁵⁸ While indigenous Fijian men are not members of SSV, women constantly acknowledge their affiliation to political networks led by indigenous men. For example, in the 1970s women from SSV spoke out in favor of the indigenous, nationalist, male-dominated Fijian Alliance Party.⁵⁹ Despite criticisms from women in other NGOs who asserted that women need to unite to confront patriarchal oppression, the standpoint of women from SSV was and has been influenced by the recognition that ethnicity comes before gender. In other words, they agree that they are indigenous Fijians before they are women.⁶⁰ This tendency to mobilize on the basis of race first is still evident amongst the vast majority of women's organizations in Fiji.

Indeed, the question that needs to be posed is: how do 'traditional and rural-based organizations concerned with the welfare of women within the ethnic and customary context'⁶¹ with close associations with the church contribute to the empowerment of organic women? Scheyvens response is that: 'Collective networking through the church

provides opportunities to share ideas and identify strategic interests, and allow time out from mundane everyday activities'.⁶² Women are provided opportunities to discuss commonalities and differences and attend social functions where they exchange ideas that 'encourage a sense of dignity, a desire for literacy and a broader horizon'.⁶³ Shameem adds to this discussion: 'The moment women organized activities in associations and organizations in the village they were negotiating a separate space for themselves.'⁶⁴

We can argue further that by learning the patriarchally defined skills of white women (such as cooking and sewing)⁶⁵ indigenous Fijian women empowered themselves economically. The participation of colonized women in 'colonial enterprises' gave them the opportunity to learn skills that enabled them to earn an income and survive in a market-driven economy. Whether the money was used to put their children through school, or build a bus-shelter or lavatory for members of the village, women were helping to improve the living standard in their communities and meet their immediate needs. The platform of such associations is consistent with an anti-poverty approach – that is, one that aims to enhance women's productive role through income generation.⁶⁶ Today, aside from cooking, sewing and making handicrafts, some women from SSV now engage in individually or group managed micro-financed projects (including chicken farming, vegetable gardening, flower/horticulture business and *voivoi* (pandanus) planting and selling).⁶⁷

The Pan-Pacific & Southeast Asian Women's Movement

This tradition of associations along ethnic lines was disrupted in the mid 1930s with the establishment of the Pan-Pacific Women's Association (PPWA) in Hawaii.⁶⁸ A few years later, a Fiji branch was established with the primary aim of strengthening the bonds of peace and fostering a better understanding among women of Asia and the South Pacific.⁶⁹ 'This organization was to be the 'women's arm' of a high-level American-led political and economic alliance aimed at ensuring Pacific security in the Post World War I reconstruction era through 'mutual understanding'.⁷⁰ 'As American interests in the Pacific took the form of an interest in women and their issues',⁷¹ PPWA brought 'the commonalities and differences between women into sharp focus.'⁷² It was later renamed the Pan-Pacific and Southeast Asian Women's Association (PPSEAWA) to cater for the increasing number of Asian and Pacific Islander members.

PPSEAWA's desire to unite women transnationally and transculturally was a stepping-stone for Asian and Pacific Islander women. As Paul Hooper contends: 'Apart from formally establishing organized women's activities in the Pacific Basin, it was, at least as far as can be determined, the first women's group anywhere to be founded upon transcultural purposes.'⁷³ Indeed, women from the Association acknowledged that, despite their differences, Asian and Pacific-Islander women were united by a string of shared lived experiences or commonalities. At a conference in 1930, President, Georgina Sweet (also a World President of the YWCA), announced that the association's aim was 'to initiate and promote cooperation among women for the study and betterment of

existing social conditions'.⁷⁴ The primary challenge for PPSEAWA was 'how to apply a politics of diversity to the needs of political collaboration?'.⁷⁵

Like colonial discourses, PPSEAWA's ethos was heavily motivated by perceptions of the 'native other'. White women (Miss A. M. Griffen and Miss Olive Meek) representing Fiji at conferences in 1928 and 1930 lamented 'the tragedy of the simple-minded Fijian race still living in the stone-age but rapidly facing rapid modernization'.⁷⁶ It was not until the Tokyo Conference in 1958 that an Indigenous Fijian woman, Lolohea Waqairawai, attended as a delegate. For Fijian women, this was when cross-cultural exchanges between the Pacific and the international world commenced in a real sense – an exchange that allowed Fijian women to represent themselves and not to be misrepresented by others.

In his article, 'Pacific Feminism: The Pan-Pacific and Southeast Asian Women's Association', Paul Hooper offered the following critique of PPSEAWA:

While constantly concerned about the status of women in the Pacific nations and dedicated to the notion that a greater feminine involvement in public affairs will hasten the solution of public problems, the organization's concern has always been with particular political, social, and economic problems rather than specifically feminist issues. In other words, it has never been a *militant* feminist group placing the issue of women's rights above all else and has not, therefore, contributed directly to the women's movement in the fashion of such historical organizations such as the National American Women's Suffrage Association or such contemporary groups as the National Organization for women.⁷⁷

What Hooper fails to see is that women's needs are different and not based on a singular, monolithic view of patriarchy or women's oppression. Hooper's homogenization and systemization of feminisms and feminist movements in relation to western or American feminisms, further disregards the impact of factors such as colonialism and class on Asian and Pacific Islander women. His later declaration that the Association's first concern has always been with particular political, social and economic problems rather than with specific feminist issues is somewhat erroneous. Surely feminism is all about political, social and economic contestations. Can we really talk about feminisms without taking into account women's political agendas, the social construction of gender or the subordination of women because they are not economically empowered? On the whole, Hooper fails to accept that there are many strands of feminist thought and levels of consciousness. In the sections that follow, I will explore the platform of the contemporary women's movement that emerged with the formation of the Public Affairs Committee of the Fiji Y.

The Contemporary Women's Movement

The Fiji Young Women's Christian Association

The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), an international 'women's membership movement nourished by its roots in the Christian faith and sustained by the richness of many beliefs and values',⁷⁸ aims to draw together members 'who strive to create opportunities for women's growth, leadership, and power, in order to create a common vision: peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all people'.⁷⁹ In accordance with this largely universal vision, the Fiji Y's primary objective, since its formation, has been

to promote and encourage Christian practice by fostering the spiritual, physical, cultural, and social development of young people and women.⁸⁰ Pioneers of the Suva branch comprised women from a range of ethnic groups, for instance, English, Australian, Indigenous Fijian, Indo-Fijian, Chinese, Pacific Islander, and part-European women. Amongst them were Ann Walker (founding president), Ruth Lechte (member and president in the late 1960s), Lady Eleanor Maddocks, Susan Parkinson, Tulia Koroi, Esther Williams, Lolohea Waqairiwai, and Amelia Rokotuivuna (a key figure in the Fijian women's movement).⁸¹ This group of women designed and developed programs and policies to: improve the situation of Fijian women and girls; inculcate in women an attitude of self-reliance through the expansion of creative, productive, and leadership potential; change legislation on citizenship, immigration, marriage, divorce, maintenance, and abortion; and organize women to ensure their productivity as workers.⁸² In particular, they aimed to better the economic status of women through literacy and technical training campaigns conducted with women from rural areas.

In the 1960s, women from USP introduced an academic focus to the Fiji Y by developing an active voice in community organization. In fact, it is possible to trace a convergence between the voices of some academic women from USP and women from the Fiji Y, particularly those who were part of the Public Affairs Committee. This convergence makes it difficult to theorize the articulations of the two groups of women separately because as Rokotuivuna, explains: 'Most of the young women at the Y in the 1970s were a crop from the University'.⁸³ Rokotuivuna goes on to argue that: 'It was this group of

academic women who first theoretically approached the idea of feminism⁸⁴ through intersections with transnational feminist discourses.

Women from USP and the Fiji Y were exposed to western feminist criticisms of patriarchy at the international level. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* had established itself as a landmark text in its exploration of 'the problem with no name'.⁸⁵ Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* initiated radical discussion on sexuality and representation.⁸⁶ Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*⁸⁷ set off a feminist revolution in its witty exploration of 'the destructive emasculation of women by patriarchy'.⁸⁸ Other feminists contended that women are distinct or different from men and have different agendas, shifting the core of second-wave feminisms from equality feminisms to gynocentric, Marxist/socialist, radical, postcolonial, psychoanalytic, and French feminisms,⁸⁹ although many of these are now in heated contestation.⁹⁰

The responses of women at the Fiji Y and USP to such discourses is wonderfully summarized by USP graduate and Fiji Y member, Claire Slatter. In her recollection of how Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* was passed around at USP, Slatter exclaimed: 'It was like... wow!'⁹¹ She provides a context for this statement:

This was the early seventies, still riding on the radicalism of the sixties. We were getting student newspapers from elsewhere which challenged a whole lot of things... so that was the style of writing generally. And then you have these women who stumbled on Germaine Greer and then wanted to write about their own society.⁹²

Vanessa Griffen, also a USP student and Fiji Y member, endorses Slatter's contention as she writes:

We were beginning to read in the 1970s about what was happening in the women's movement in the western world, in America. Articles were also appearing in the local newspapers... A few of us could grasp, without coming from that world, that there was a universal element of truth in these writings. We took these ideas seriously and began writing about them in our student newspaper.⁹³

Three articles published in the student newspaper, *UNISPAC*, in 1972 that Slatter and Griffen refer to include: Vanessa Griffen's 'About these Women', Sera Ravesi's 'Can the Fijian Woman be liberated?' and Claire Slatter's 'Woman Power: Myth or Reality?'⁹⁴ Griffen's article in particular, reiterated the argument that men and women have been conditioned into their respective roles of 'protector/provider and home-maker'⁹⁵ – an argument that Helene Cixous theorizes in terms of 'a dichotomy of patriarchal binary thought'.⁹⁶ All three articles drew some response from the University community and the women defended them by writing letters and articles in *UNISPAC*. Their overall argument was that: 'Women in the Pacific have an unfair and unequal position, low status, and are oppressed by society's expectations of them.'⁹⁷

Human Rights activist, Shaista Shameem (also a fellow student at USP and a member of the Fiji Y), recalled that: 'The books written by women in the 1960s and 1970s were very useful to us'.⁹⁸ In particular, Shameem refers to Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* which argues that since World War Two (white, heterosexual, middle-class) suburban

American women believed (or were made to believe by patriarchal society) they could achieve happiness in life through marriage and motherhood. Friedan calls this ‘problem with no name’ the feminine mystique.⁹⁹ Shameem’s recollection of Friedan’s work and ‘the problem with no name’ is striking because, as she puts it: ‘Although we were aware at the time Friedan was writing about white middle-class women, we felt empathy for her position’.¹⁰⁰ She elaborates: ‘What was remarkable about Fijian women’s first encounters with international women’s discourses was that we were quick not to fall into various traps’¹⁰¹ by passively accepting these theories without stopping to question them. Much of this intersection with transnational discourses was furthered by the intellectual climate of the University and its emphasis on other schools of thought and theories such as Marxism and Development Studies.¹⁰²

Women from the Fiji Y (who were students at USP) did not merely assimilate these transnational discourses. Instead, they read some of the texts listed above (amongst many others) and developed their own standpoint. As Shameem put it: ‘We did not choose the Marxist way, the lesbian way or purely a third world context’¹⁰³ but instead developed a multi-textual or amalgamated standpoint that was ‘unique and special to us’.¹⁰⁴ Here Shameem suggests that Fijian women in the 1960s and 1970s were aware of the relationship between women’s activism and other categories of difference such as race, class, sexuality, colonialism, and imperialism. Women acknowledged that the struggles they chose to make among and between struggles was vital to their activism. In this respect, the Fiji Y (in particular, the Public Affairs Committee) comprised women with

divergent histories woven together by their opposition to various forms of domination. This 'third world' began to emerge in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Of the numerous clubs and programs founded by the Fiji Y, the Public Affairs Committee was clearly the most radical and vocal. This Committee was established in the mid 1960s and largely comprised academic women (including women from USP mentioned earlier). These women met to: study community problems, educate its members through the publication of newsletters, present the opinions of its off-spring the Viewpoints Club, and take action for the Fiji Y.¹⁰⁵ They also, through the Viewpoints Club, politicized and feminized a range of issues including immigration policies, beauty contests, capital punishment, crime, education, and patterns of economic development and fiscal policy in the nation.¹⁰⁶ These consciousness-raising exercises involved, first creating an awareness on gender issues and how other more general issues impacted on women and second, instituting changes that would improve living conditions for women (and young people) in Fiji. By 1972, members had already observed such changes as they commented: 'Much useful study and interesting research is reported at the end of each year by the Public Affairs Newsletter. Changes in attitude and law have resulted from work done by the groups within the Committee'.¹⁰⁷

In fact, it is possible to argue that the birth of the Public Affairs Committee signaled the emergence of the contemporary women's movement in Fiji. Chinese feminists, Naihua Zhang and Wu Xu, define the new women's movement as: 'A more open, liberal, and pluralistic environment characterized by freer expression of individual choice, the inflow

of western thoughts and ideas, a revival of academic studies in all fields, and greater freedom to form new networks and groups'.¹⁰⁸ Evidence of this new movement is exemplified in the following quote:

I think in the seventies the [Fiji] Y was really the leading progressive and radical if you like, women's organization. It espoused a feminist platform which also had this very wide, broad concern with social justice, economic justice and equality between people of all ethnic groups.¹⁰⁹

This more open and liberal environment was evident as women from the Public Affairs Committee started talking about abortion on the radio in the 1970s.¹¹⁰ Board member of the YWCA, Miriel Bamford, stated in relation to abortion: 'We believe not for it or against it but in the right of every woman to decide... I would like to ask women's movements to open up the discussion and listen to us on the issue'.¹¹¹ This plea for women's autonomy over their bodies was one that women activists advanced in the 1970s. What was particularly notable about the Public Affairs Committee's stance on this issue was that instead of reiterating a pro-life (Christian) viewpoint (as many women's church groups did at the time), it asserted the pro-choice stance: 'In the end, no matter what the official view of the religion is, it is the woman who herself decides'.¹¹² However, not all women from the Fiji Y supported this standpoint. In fact, Slatter noted that women from the Association were divided on the abortion issue.¹¹³

Women from the Fiji Y who embraced the abortion debate (many of whom belonged to the Public Affairs Committee) made their stance quite clear. In addition to conducting

and publishing a study on abortion cases and statistics,¹¹⁴ they also played an active role in pro-life protests. The following recollection by Rokotuivuna reinforces the Public Affairs Committee's radical position towards abortion at a time when the liberation of women was a new concept in Fiji:

In the 1970s we walked into a pro-life meeting organized by the churches and began articulating our views on abortion. I was in my denim jeans and the man chairing the session actually said to me, 'Are you a man or woman?' And I said back to him, 'I'm a woman and I'm very sure about my identity'... We broke up the meeting.¹¹⁵

The fact that a group of women from the Fiji publicly and vocally opposed the view of the churches in relation to abortion is a crucial one in the Association's history. The above recollection also highlights male, Christian, reactions to women's liberation in Fiji which is wonderfully summarized in Slatter's words: 'If you were a feminist in our time, you were seen as a lesbian!'¹¹⁶ The man chairing the pro-life meeting expressed the fear underlying much of the male anxiety about female reproductive freedom, that is, the threat to male family control. Susan Faludi presents this argument within a western context: 'So often in the battle over the fetus' rights to life in the 1980s, the patriarch's eclipsed ability to make the family decisions figured as a bitter sub-text, the unspoken but pressing agenda of the anti-abortion campaign'.¹¹⁷ This sub-text was also applicable to Fijian women from the Public Affairs Committee who fought for women's sexual freedom in the 1960s and 1970s. Not surprisingly, they were branded 'man-hating lesbians' or 'child-killers'.¹¹⁸ Despite these kinds of confrontations with men (and

women) who held conservative religious views, women from this Committee continued to challenge Christian, patriarchal society at public gatherings and in their newsletters on abortion. They also broached another contentious issue – male and female sexuality.

Women from the Public Affairs Committee's Viewpoints Club 'endeavored to supplement as well as complement the press on topics of social and political interest'.¹¹⁹ This Club held five annual meetings to debate topical issues. In 1968 the Viewpoint Club's opening topic was homosexuality in Fiji. The opinion of the Club was that 'homosexual practices between consenting adults should be made legal'.¹²⁰ The Public Affairs Committee's newsletter for the year reiterated this stance:

The topic for the year on legalizing homosexual practice between consenting adults followed the repeal of divorce laws and reviews of laws on homosexuality in England. Our press was silent on the topic, so Viewpoints Club took it up with the aim of promoting a more sympathetic understanding for people afflicted with homosexual leanings as Fiji had just recently had uproar over homosexuality.¹²¹

In the same newsletter, the Viewpoints Club asserted further: 'We are certain that it is essential for the happiness of all, that each thinking person endeavors to be *informed* and thus more able to lend *sympathetic understanding* to people on the *other side*' [Viewpoint Club's emphasis].¹²² While Christian positions on homosexuality differ today, the fact that women in the 1970s were fighting for gay and lesbian rights – rights that are still not

legally recognized in Fiji to this day – was a landmark for the women’s movement. Moreover, this affirmation that sexual acts among members of the same sex be made legal, clearly contradicted Christian beliefs that sexual relations should only take place between a married man and his wife. What then were the consequences of such views for members from the Fiji Y?

At the third National Convention of the Fiji Y in 1976, women from the Association contended: ‘It has been the active and vocal involvement of the Y in certain areas of concern which have primarily caused some members of the public to ask “what is the YWCA?” and still others to define for us what we should be’.¹²³ This critical moment in the association’s history (1973-1976) ‘saw a sporadic questioning by some of the membership of certain of the Association’s policies and programs—a questioning which precipitated a serious polarization of opinion and outlook in one of the association’s branches’.¹²⁴ The result was a backlash involving politicians, preservers of local/patriarchal cultures, religious advocates, and women. Slatter explains:

In the seventies the Y had a crisis that was triggered by a financial problem that enabled the members of the board at the time to justify a restructuring exercise. So in the face of it, it looked like an economic rationalization exercise but in fact it was trying to cut out those people who presented this much more outspoken, radical, critical leadership for the Y and to tame it. And those on the board that were driving this so called restructuring exercise, were members of a political party which happened to be in power. This made it even more evident that it

was a political exercise to contain this organization and its influence on young women.¹²⁵

By attempting to 'tame' the Fiji Y, the perpetrators of the backlash took away much of its radical edge and converted it into a non-threatening/non-revolutionary organization. This meant, for instance, that discussions on and around issues such as abortion and homosexuality were removed from the association's agenda and prominence was given to less controversial issues such as sports and fundraising.

A significant consequence of this backlash was the resignation of Rokotuivuna as the executive president and radical force behind the Fiji Y. For Fijian women Rokotuivuna's name was synonymous with the Y.¹²⁶ Pioneer member, Parkinson, fondly recalls: 'I will never forget the contribution Amelia Rokotuivuna made to the Fiji Y'.¹²⁷ And, despite the fact that this Association was taken over by educated and articulate women after Rokotuivuna's resignation, some Fijian women argue quite convincingly that during the late 1970s the Fiji Y lost its 'radical edge'.¹²⁸ As Indigenous Fijian activist, Vulaono puts it: 'somewhere along the line the Y lost their radical feminism'.¹²⁹ Moore endorses these claims as she states: 'There was a nice strong beginning to our women's movement with the Fiji Y, then as women went off to study or left the organization it died down'.¹³⁰ What was especially noteworthy about the 1976 backlash and Rokotuivuna's resignation was the role that women played. The Fiji Y newsletter *Arena* captures this view as it states: 'As one of the few really outspoken women in the community at the time, Rokotuivuna said she had felt strong pressure, much of it from women who did not want

to accept a new kind of female image'.¹³¹ In this way, women colluded with the various patriarchies in Fiji and furthered the backlash.

Focus Feminisms

Although women's organizations in the 1980s furthered the radical and theoretically-engaged platform pioneered by the Public Affairs Committee, at times, this platform was overshadowed by the focus or issue centered feminisms of the Fiji Women's Crisis Center and the Fiji Women's Rights Movement. Rokotuivuna has criticized this specialized approach as she argues that women's organizations in the 1980s engaged less in ideological discussions about women's empowerment and concentrated more on singular development issues or drafts on the Beijing Platform of Action.¹³² Slatter argues similarly: 'We went through this period between 1975 and 1985 when a lot of the women's development initiatives for improving the status of women actually were taken over by agencies and donors'.¹³³ While this change was crucial to women's development economically, Slatter contends further that, to some extent, 'it depoliticized women'.¹³⁴

While I concur with Slatter and Rokotuivuna, it is important to emphasize that women's transnational discourses are not static and have evolved locally, regionally, and globally since the 1960s. Thus, a range of external and internal factors, discourses, and policies (such as globalization, an awareness of human rights, development incentives, foreign aid and so forth) have impacted on Fijian women's agency and activism, which is not to say that their effects have all been negative. In fact, one of the main benefits of the streamlined or issue-centered activism of the 1980s and 1990s is that they have enabled

women's organizations to concentrate on a limited set of concerns and to lobby more rigorously on a specific issue. Below are two examples of such organizations.

The Fiji Women's Crisis Center: Violence against Women

To a large extent, the Fiji Women's Crisis Center (FWCC) continued the transnational discourse espoused by the Fiji Y in the sixties and seventies. This non-governmental organization was established in Suva in 1984 by 'expatriate women and teachers, nurses and social workers from Fiji'.¹³⁵ Its main objective was to respond to the high incidence of sexual assaults (namely, domestic violence, sexual harassment, and child abuse) and the lack of support services for women who were survivors of violence.¹³⁶ In this way, FWCC pioneered what was to become a specific discourse against violence as it worked towards empowering women and helping them to remove themselves from violent situations. Women from the Center summarized their objectives in the following way: 'We work on the principle of the empowerment of women. We believe that all forms of violence against women are a violation of women's human rights, and that no one has the right to inflict violence on a woman or child under any circumstance.'¹³⁷ In an attempt to fulfill its objectives, FWCC provides free and confidential non-judgmental crisis counseling, legal advice, emotional support, communication education and public advocacy.¹³⁸ It also participates in international awareness-raising campaigns such as International Women's Day and Sixteen Days of Activism against Gender Violence. In this sense, the platform espoused by the Crisis Center is transnational, transcultural, theoretically-engaged (particularly in relation to violence against women) and overtly feminist.

Ali contends that FWCC focuses on issues that are important to women (for example, violence against women) and espouses an ethnically diverse platform.¹³⁹ She further acknowledges the relationship between Fijian and international women's discourses when she asserts: 'We need a new wave of feminism. Germaine Greer wrote that it is time to get angry again because we've become too complacent and I think that she is right'.¹⁴⁰ This relationship is highlighted again as Ali stresses: 'I think that women from Fiji should not forget the history of western feminists... And feminists from the 1960s and 1970s like Kate Millett and Germaine Greer'.¹⁴¹ In this sense, Ali (like women from the Fiji Y's Public Affairs Committee) affirms that there is an intricate connection between Fijian women and women internationally.

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement

While the FWCC's platform is embedded in praxis, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) concentrates on collaborating with government agencies, donors, and women from other organizations to better the situation of Fijian women. The latter organization was formed by members of the Fiji Women's Crisis Center and the Fiji Y's Public Affairs Committee in Suva in 1986.¹⁴² This 'multiracial women's organization'¹⁴³ was to engage in more public, political, and legal lobbies, allowing the Crisis Center to focus on counseling and issues related to violence against women which sometimes required more discrete actions.¹⁴⁴ As FWRM strove to redress the imbalances of women's socio-economic, legal, and political status, it stimulated national dialogues between women's non-governmental organizations at the national level and the Fiji Government, cross-cultural dialogues between Fijian women, and regional dialogues between Pacific

Islander women. Some of the first legislative issues taken up by FWRM in the 1980s included challenging rape legislation, ratifying the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),¹⁴⁵ and fighting for women's citizenship rights.¹⁴⁶

FWRM has questioned rape legislation in Fiji since 1986, and demanded harsher sentences for rapists. It has also advocated for the removal of traditional reconciliation practices (such as the *bulubulu*) that discriminate against victims of rape. In 1988 new rape sentencing guidelines were issued, stating that the starting point for rape sentencing was five years in a contested case or more depending on the specific nature of the case.¹⁴⁷ In 1990, however, new guidelines were circulated, quashing much of the 1988 guidelines. Rape legislations are still being contested by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement and the Crisis Center today.

At a national meeting on CEDAW in Suva in 1995, women's organizations called on the Fiji Government to ratify CEDAW without reservation before the World Conference on Women in Beijing.¹⁴⁸ In August 1995, CEDAW was ratified by the Fiji Government but there were two reservations. One of these reservations (article 9)¹⁴⁹ prompted women to lobby for equal citizenship for foreign spouses and their children. According to article 9 the Fiji government is required to amend sections of its 1990 Constitution to give Fijian women the same rights as Fijian men in terms of citizenship and rights for their children. The citizenship campaign to advocate constitutional changes and thereby guarantee equal citizenship rights for foreign spouses and their children in Fiji was first mounted by

women from the Fiji Y prior to independence in 1970.¹⁵⁰ In May 1996, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement formed and coordinated the Women's Coalition for Women's Citizenship Rights to lobby for reforms to the 1990 constitution. After years of lobbying Government and mounting media campaigns and public forums, women of Fiji were granted equal citizenship rights in 2000.

With a growing awareness on women's rights from the 1980s, the platforms of ethnically-based organizations that we still find in Fiji today have diversified. For example, in 2000 women from the *Stri Sewa Sabha* and the *Soqosoqo Vakamara* undertook the very important task of translating CEDAW into Fiji Hindi and Fijian. In addition to disseminating pamphlets on this convention to grassroots women, women from organizations like the *Sabha* have begun to collaborate with multiethnic women's organizations such as FWCC, the Fiji Y and FWRM. These collaborations were, to some extent, the result of the coups in Fiji from 1987 to 2006.

Democracy and Peace

It is impossible to discuss women's activism in Fiji without considering the impact of the coups of 1987, 2000 and 2006 on Fijian women and their organizing. De Ishtar writes: 'After the coups human rights abuses were rife throughout Fiji'.¹⁵¹ The military assumed a dictatorship of the nation and racial tension was exacerbated. Instances of domestic violence and rape also increased in the wake of the 1987 and 2000 coups – the connection being militarism.¹⁵² Patriarchal systems are invariably strengthened by forms of militarism.¹⁵³ Griffen notes: 'After the 1987 coup, in the brief period when there was

actual racial violence, many rapes of women took place, which women in the Fiji Women's Crisis Center heard about, but which were not reported to the police'.¹⁵⁴ There were also confirmed incidences of gang rapes of women by Speight and his group of supporters at the parliament house in Suva during the height of the 2000 coup.¹⁵⁵ There were also economic implications arising from the coups in Fiji. 'Many women domestic workers lost their jobs, or had to accept less money, as their employers themselves suffered pay cuts or loses in business. These burdens passed on to women – the most lowly paid employees'.¹⁵⁶ In addition to the gross exploitation of Fijian women and overall poverty that resulted from the Fiji coups, the coups impacted on women's organizations in two ways.

On the one hand, the coups furthered an ethnic divide in the Fijian women's movement, as some groups of Indo-Fijian and Indigenous Fijian women met to promote the agenda of their ethnic group. Goodwillie and Kaloumaira draw attention to this view as they discuss how racial polarization during the coups created divisions within the Fiji Women's Rights Movement:

Indigenous Fijian women thought the Fiji Women's Rights Movement should focus on gender and leave democracy to other Civil Service Organizations. The Movement's indigenous Fijian Members were seen to be disloyal to the Fijians and although many hours were spent discussing this issue and encouraging them to remain as members, many resigned.¹⁵⁷

The standpoint of women from such organizations was complicated by their affiliations to indigenous political parties. During the 2000 coup, a women's wing was launched in Suva as an affiliate of the *Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewanivanua* government. This organization has been criticized by feminists for supporting and advancing Fijian nationalism.

Although the coups were devastating for the country and its citizens, it had the remarkable effect of endowing women's organizations in Fiji with a new political relevance. Griffen finds that the coups have been an opportunity to activate women to talk about the status of women.¹⁵⁸ She elaborates:

Women's and community groups have come up with a very principled defense of Fiji society. They are fighting for a demilitarized Fiji, a less violent Fiji, a more just Fiji. Promoting an alternative way of doing things, and presenting the idea of justice and political relations based on sorting out economic and social relationships, women have taken the leadership roles and are doing the consciousness-raising.¹⁵⁹

Baghwan-Rolls similarly argues: 'The post-2000 crisis empowered a lot more younger women – women who never really belonged to the Fiji feminist movement'.¹⁶⁰ Some of these young women joined existing women's organizations, while others proceeded to establish new organizations such as Women's Action for Democracy and Peace and Fem'Link Pacific. The former held peace vigils and lobbied for a return to democracy

while the latter, was established in response to the lack of gender initiatives by the mainstream media prior to, and especially since the 2000 crisis in the Fiji Islands. Walker discusses the courage and resilience shown by Fijian women during these years of unrest beginning in 1987: 'Groups such as the Fiji YWCA, Fem'Link Pacific, Fiji Women's Rights Movement, Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and more have stayed active and outspoken. Yet, they have little say in negotiations and are largely ignored by people in power - currently the military. In fact their activities have been severely curtailed and they are under constant intimidation'.¹⁶¹ While the coup cycle has reduced opportunities for mobilization around gender issues, women's organizations like Fem'Link Pacific, FWCC and FWRM continue to resist militarism and advocate for democracy and peace.

Conclusion

Fijian women often affirm an amalgamated stance or 'positional plurality' in relation to a range of discourses at the national, regional and international level. Such is the symbiotic nature of the many and varied strands of women's activism and agency in Fiji, the Pacific and the world. The practice of 'mapping out' women's activism or situating the complexity of local, historically situated developments of women's activism and their intersections with regional and international contexts (which has been the central focus of this article), is of critical importance to Fijian women because it affirms the diversity of our experiences. This practice may further incite us to challenge patriarchal historiography and offer an alternative account of temporal events. In line with the article's overall objectives, this genealogy makes a methodological contribution (and not just an empirical one) to discourses on women's activism and agency as it charts the

continuities and ruptures, between, as well as within, the *talanoa* of Fijian, Pacific Islander, western, postcolonial and black women. It has also examined the ways in which, despite the rifts in the women's movement and in post-coup Fijian society in general, urban and rural women of different ethnic, class, religious and sexual backgrounds recognize their 'connections in resistances'.¹⁶² Recognition of these 'connections' through debate and dialogue have led to an intensification of urban-rural collaborations among women. These have strengthened the amalgamated, integrated or transformative nature of the Fijian women's movement. Each of these struggles, for instance, selling cakes or handicraft items to feed and educate a poverty-stricken family, raising awareness on reproductive rights, translating CEDAW into vernacular, lobbying against violence against women, making a distinct contribution to women's legal rights and lobbying for peace and democracy, are significant. The challenge ahead for Fijian women is to continue all aspects of these collaborative efforts and to continue to talk about women's rights, economic empowerment, democracy and peace using networks and spaces available to them.

Notes

1

¹ 'Fijian' includes all women who reside in Fiji (indigenous Fijian, Indo-Fijian, Chinese, European, Part-European, Rotuman and Pacific Islander women). For more details on Rotuma, annexed to Fiji after it was ceded to Great Britain in 1879, see <http://www.rotuma.net/os/History.html>).

² Shaista Shameem, Talanoa Session (Suva, 24 May, 2002).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Women's testimonies cited here were gathered during *talanoa* or focus-group discussion sessions conducted from March-June 2002, for my doctoral dissertation titled '*Marama Tok: A History of the*

Women's Movement in Fiji (1920-2004)'. More than 150 women from NGOs in Fiji participated in the *talanoa* sessions. These women were coordinators, counselors, social workers, lawyers and rurally based activists.

⁵ Brij Lal, *Broken Waves: A History of the Fiji Islands in the Twentieth Century* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 4-5.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Tauga Vulaono, "Profile Study of Women in Development in Fiji," paper for Japan International Corporation Agency (August 1998), 7.

⁸ Lal, *Broken Waves*, 4.

⁹ Ibid, 13.

¹⁰ See Brij Lal, "Kunti's Cry: indentured women on Fiji's plantations," in *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 22, no. 1 (1985): 57 and Vijay Naidu, *The Violence of Indenture in Fiji*, (Suva: The World University Service and School of Social and Economic Development, The University of the South Pacific, 1980), 19-23.

¹¹ Lal, Kunti's Cry, 57.

¹² Lal, *Broken Waves*, 34.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Zohl De Ishtar, *Daughters of the Pacific* (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1994), 125.

¹⁵ John Kelly, *A Politics of Virtue: Hinduism, Sexuality and Countercolonial discourse in Fiji* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 195.

¹⁶ 'Unlike women in New Zealand and South Africa, women in Fiji did not fight for the vote or the right to stand in elections. All Fiji citizens were given both these rights in 1963'. See Rae Nicholl, "Electing Women to Parliament: Fiji and the Alternative Vote Electoral System," in *Pacific Journalism Review* 12, no. 1 (2006).

¹⁷ De Ishtar, *Daughters of the Pacific*, 238.

¹⁸ "Women translate CEDAW into Fijian and Hindi," *The Daily Post* (17 April, 2002), 2.

¹⁹ Miles Johnson and Jim Carney, *Fiji Sun* (15 May, 1987), 1.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Imrana Jalal, "Gender Issues in post coup d'état Fiji: Snapshots from the Fiji Islands," Keynote Address, Townsville International Women's Conference, James Cook University (3-7 July, 2002), 4.

²² Ibid.

²³ See Margaret Mishra "The Emergence of Feminism in Fiji," in *Women's History Review* 17, no. 1, (February 2008), 39-56.

²⁴ Naidu, *The Violence of Indenture in Fiji*, 20.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Shameem, "Sugar and Spice," 288.

²⁸ John Kelly, "Jaikumari" in Brij Lal, ed. *Bittersweet* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2004), 61.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "The Indian Trouble," *The Fiji Times and Herald* (25 February, 1920), 9.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Colonial Secretary's Office Manuscript, (Suva: The National Archives, no. 51/21, 1934).

³³ Shameem, "Sugar and Spice," 358.

³⁴ Ibid, 274.

³⁵ Peni Moore, Talanoa Session (Suva, 16 May, 2002).

³⁶ Irene Tinker, "Advocates, Practitioners and Scholars," in *The Women, Gender and Development Reader*, Nalini Visvanathan, Lynn Duggan, Laurie Nisonoff and Nan Wieggersma, ed. (New Jersey: Zed Books Limited, 1997), 20.

³⁷ Kelly, *A Politics of Virtue*, 372.

³⁸ Ibid, 375.

³⁹ Colonial Secretary's Office Manuscript (Suva: National Archives of Fiji, no.51/21).

⁴⁰ Papers held at the National Archives of Fiji, (Reference no: F51/21-pt.2/).

⁴¹ Claudia Knapman, *White Women in Fiji 1835-1930: The Ruin of the Empire?* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986), 146.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Eci Kikau, "Of Challenges and Choices: Women's Organizations in Rural Development," Masters Thesis (Suva: School of Social and Economic Development, University of the South Pacific, 1986).

⁴⁴ See *Maternity and Modernities: colonial and postcolonial experiences in Asia and the Pacific*, Kalpana Ram and Margaret Jolly, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁴⁵ Shameem, "Sugar and Spice," 335.

⁴⁶ See Mona Wilson, "The Conference of Women Workers," in *The Economic Journal* 8, no: 9 (1898).

⁴⁷ Tauga Vulaono, Talanoa Session (Suva, 11 April 2002).

⁴⁸ Capell, *A New Fijian Dictionary*, 163.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 154.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 178.

⁵¹ Ibid, 201.

⁵² Ibid, 251.

⁵³ Ibid, 136.

⁵⁴ Eta Baro, *Women's Role in Fiji* (Suva: The South Pacific Social Sciences Association, 1975), 41.

⁵⁵ Eci Kikau, "Of Challenges and Choices," 1986.

⁵⁶ Eta Varani Norton, "The Church Versus Women's Push for Change: The Case of Fiji" in *Fijian Studies* 3, no. 2, 2009), 223-247.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 15.

⁵⁸ Jacqueline Leckie "Women's Agency in Fiji," in *Fijian Studies: A Journal of Contemporary History* 3, no. 2, 1999 and Nicole George, "Advocacy or Activism: Gender Politics in Fiji," Doctoral Dissertation, Department of International Relations, Australian National University (2004), 84-85.

⁵⁹ Rokotuivuna, Talanoa.

⁶⁰ Soqosoqo Vakamarama, Talanoa.

⁶¹ Jalal, "The Status of Women and the Constitution," 85.

⁶² Scheyvens, R. "Church Women's Groups and the Empowerment of Women in the Solomon Islands," in *Oceania* 74, no. 1 and 2 (2003), 24-43.

40

⁶³ Margaret Jolly, "Epilogue," in *Oceania* 74, no. 1 and 2 (2003), 134-147.

⁶⁴ Shameem, Talanoa.

⁶⁵ Baro, *Women's Role in Fiji*, 41.

⁶⁶ Nalini Visvanathan, "Introduction to Part 1," in *The Women, Gender and Development Reader*, Nalini Visvanathan, Lynn Duggan, Laurie Nisonoff and Nan Wiegersma, ed. (New Jersey: Zed Books Limited, 1997), 20.

⁶⁷ Norton, "The Church Versus Women's push for change," 227.

⁶⁸ Paul Hooper, "Feminism in the Pacific: The Pan-Pacific and Southeast Asian Women's Association," (Pacific Collection, University of the South Pacific Library, Unpublished Paper), 367.

⁶⁹ Pan-Pacific and Southeast Asian Women's Association, *Newsletter*, Suva, Pan-Pacific and Southeast Asian Women's Association (May 1970), 1.

⁷⁰ Annelise Riles, *The Network Inside Out* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 27.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² See Fiona Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific: Cultural Internationalism and Race Politics in the Women's Pan-Pacific* (University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 2009), 19.

⁷³ Hooper, "Feminism in the Pacific," 367.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 376.

⁷⁵ Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific*, 19.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 79.

⁷⁷ Hooper, "Feminism in the Pacific," 367.

⁷⁸ The Young Women's Christian Association, mission statement: www.ywca.org/site/pp.asp?c+djISI6KpG86=281272 (viewed on 24 August, 2008).

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ The Fiji Young Women's Christian Association, *Constitution*, Suva, The Fiji Young Women's Christian Association (1980), 1.

⁸¹ Ruth Lechte and Diane Goodwillie, Talanoa Session (Suva, Fiji, 1 May, 2002).

41

⁸² Claire Slatter, *Women Together: A Report of the Third National Convention of the YWCA* (Suva: The Fiji Young Women's Christian Association, 1976), 9.

⁸³ Rokoituvuna and Slatter, Talanoa.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963).

⁸⁶ Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1969).

⁸⁷ Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London: Granada Publishing Limited, 1970).

⁸⁸ Maggie Humm, *An Annotated Bibliography of Feminist Criticism* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987), 35.

⁸⁹ See Mary Ellman, *Thinking About Women* (New York: Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1968); Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1976); Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of their Own* (Princeton: University Press, 1977); Sandra Gillbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); and Michelle Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis* (London: Verso Editions and NLB, 1980).

⁹⁰ Hester Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought* (Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1984).

⁹¹ Rokoituvuna and Slatter, Talanoa, cit. from Slatter.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Vanessa Griffen, "All it Requires is Ourselves," in *Sisterhood is Global*, Robin Morgan, ed. (New York: Anchor and Doubleday, 1984), 5.

⁹⁴ Vanessa Griffen, "About these Women," in *UNISPAC* 5, no. 15-16; Sera Ravesi, "Can the Fijian Woman be liberated?" in *UNISPAC* 5, no. 19 and Claire Slatter, "Woman Power: Myth or Reality?" in *UNISPAC* 5, no. 4, 17-18. As these articles are no longer available in the archives and libraries in Fiji, second-hand accounts of their contents are cited here.

⁹⁵ Vanessa Griffen, "About these Women," 15.

⁹⁶ Helene Cixous, *Writing Differences: Readings from the Seminars of Helene Cixous*, Susan Sellers, ed. (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988), 31.

⁹⁷ Vanessa Griffen, "All It Requires is Ourselves," 518.

42

⁹⁸ Shameem, Talanoa.

⁹⁹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 15.

¹⁰⁰ Shameem, Talanoa.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Rokotuivuna and Slatter, Talanoa, cit. from Slatter.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Public Affairs Newsletter, The Fiji Young Women's Christian Association, no. 4, (December 1970), 47.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 48.

¹⁰⁷ Public Affairs Newsletter, The Fiji Young Women's Christian Association, no. 10 (December 1972).

¹⁰⁸ Naihua Xu, "Discovering the Positive Within the Negative: The Women's Movement in Changing China," in *The Challenge of Local Feminisms: Women's Movements in Global Perspective*, Amrita Basu, ed. (Colorado: Westview Press Inc. 1995), 34.

¹⁰⁹ Rokotuivuna and Slatter, Talanoa, cit. from Rokotuivuna.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, cit. from Slatter.

¹¹¹ Miriel Bamford cit. in Slatter, *Women Together a Report of the Third National Convention of the YWCA*, 49.

¹¹² *Arena* 1, no. 1, (1975), 3.

¹¹³ Rokotuivuna and Slatter, Talanoa, cit. from Slatter.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Rokotuivuna and Slatter, Talanoa, cit. from Rokotuivuna.

¹¹⁶ Rokotuivuna and Slatter, Talanoa, cit. from Slatter.

¹¹⁷ Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The undeclared war against women* (London, Vintage, 1992), 440.

¹¹⁸ Rokotuivuna and Slatter, Talanoa, cit. from Rokotuivuna.

¹¹⁹ *Public Affairs Newsletter*, The Fiji Young Women's Christian Association, (December 1968).

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Slatter, *Women Together*, 7.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Rokotuivuna and Slatter, Talanoa Session, cit. from Slatter.

¹²⁶ Susan Parkinson and Jane Ricketts, Talanoa Session (Suva, 28 May, 2002).

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Shamima Ali, Talanoa Session (Suva, 22 March, 2002).

¹²⁹ Taugo Vulaono, Talanoa Session (Suva, 11 April 2002).

¹³⁰ Peni Moore, Talanoa Session (Suva, 16 May, 2002).

¹³¹ *Arena* 1, no. 1, 1975, 1.

¹³² Rokotuivuna and Slatter. Talanoa, cit. from Rokotuivuna.

¹³³ Ibid, cit. from Slatter.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ali, Talanoa.

¹³⁶ Fiji Women's Crisis Center, *Breaking the Silence* (Suva: Fiji Women's Crisis Center, 1998), 89.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ali, Talanoa.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Diane Goodwillie and Joy Kaloumaira, "Women's Coalition for Citizenship Rights," (Unpublished paper, November, 2000), 11.

¹⁴³ Jalal, "The Status of Fiji Women and the Constitution," 85.

¹⁴⁴ Goodwillie and Kaloumaira, "Women's Coalition for Citizenship Rights," 11.

¹⁴⁵ CEDAW, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979, consists of a preamble and thirty articles that define what constitutes discrimination against women.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

- ¹⁴⁷ Jalal, "The Status of Fiji Women and the Constitution," 89.
- ¹⁴⁸ Goodwillie and Kaloumaira, "Women's Coalition for Citizenship Rights," 11.
- ¹⁴⁹ See Imrana Jalal, *Law for Pacific Women: A Legal Rights Handbook* (Suva: The University of the South Pacific, 1997).
- ¹⁵⁰ Goodwillie and Kaloumaira, 'Women's Coalition for Citizenship Rights', 7.
- ¹⁵¹ De Ishtar, *Daughters of the Pacific*, 126.
- ¹⁵² Winston Halapua, *Tradition, Lotu and Militarism in Fiji*, (Lautoka: Fiji Institute of Applied Sciences), 178.
- ¹⁵³ See Teresia Teaiwa, "Articulated Cultures: Militarism and Masculinities in Fiji during the 1990s" in *Fijian Studies: A Journal of Contemporary Studies* 2, no. 2, 201-222.
- ¹⁵⁴ Griffen in de Ishtar, *Daughters of the Pacific*, 127.
- ¹⁵⁵ *The Fiji Times*, 10, June, 2000
- ¹⁵⁶ Griffen in de Ishtar, *Daughters of the Pacific*, 127.
- ¹⁵⁷ Goodwillie and Kaloumaira, "Women's Coalition for Citizenship Rights," 12.
- ¹⁵⁸ Griffen in de Ishtar, *Daughters of the Pacific*, 128.
- ¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶⁰ Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls, Talanoa Session (Suva, 19 April 2002).
- ¹⁶¹ Anne Walker, "Women Sidelined by the Military," (Inter Press Service, 25 February, 2011).
- ¹⁶² Miles, Angela, *Integrative Feminisms: Building Global Visions 1960s-1990s* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 145.