

## Editorial

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### Editors' introductions

At the start of this year, we began our tenure as the new editorial collective for the *Women's Studies Journal Aotearoa*. This is an incredibly exciting opportunity for us, and we are honoured to take on this role. We are very grateful to the previous editorial team, Johanna Schmidt, Rachel Simon-Kumar, and Carolyn Michelle, as well as the Women's Studies Association (NZ)/Pae Akoranga Wāhine (especially Hilary Lapsley, Annie Weir and Jenny Rankine) for their support and advice during this transition process. We are also delighted that Liz Rawlings has stayed on board as our book review editor, and are looking forward to working with her.

Let us briefly introduce ourselves. Caroline Blyth is senior lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Auckland. Her research explores the complex relationship between gender, sexuality, and religion, focusing particularly on religious responses to gender-based violence. Caroline is also managing co-editor of the *Bible and Critical Theory* journal and, along with Johanna Stiebert (University of Leeds) and Katie Edwards (University of Sheffield), leads the Shiloh Project, an interdisciplinary research group exploring the intersections that exist between rape culture and religion.

Kirsten Locke is senior lecturer in the School of Critical Studies in Education at the University of Auckland. As a philosopher of education, she is particularly interested in the philosophical theories that underpin mass education systems and the ways these shape issues of gender equity and democracy in education more broadly. Kirsten's recent research has focused on women in academia and the ways in which women navigate the university landscape. Kirsten sits on the Executive Board of the innovative publishing platform for the Association of Visual Pedagogies and has a long association with the editorial board for the journal *Educational Philosophy and Theory*.

Yvonne Underhill-Sem is an associate professor in Development Studies at the University of Auckland. She is a feminist development geographer with research interests in maternities, mobilities, and markets and a particular focus on the Pacific. Yvonne is the Co-Chair of the Pacific Women Research Advisory Group, a member of the WEGO (Wellbeing, Ecology, Gender, and cOmmunity) research project which emerged from a longstanding engagement with feminist political ecology, and the Deputy Chair of the inaugural Pacific PBRF (Performance-Based Research Fund) panel.

Suzanne Woodward is a professional teaching fellow in the School of Social Sciences. Her research interests include intersectional politics, trans representations and popular media, and the identity politics of social media. She is currently working on several projects, including the relationship between communication, gender, and indigeneity, and the ethical dilemmas of artificial intelligence and robots. She is also on the editorial board of the *Journal for Queer Studies in Contemporary Culture*.

As the new editorial collective, our aim is to sustain the high quality of research published by the *Women's Studies Journal Aotearoa* since its inception in 1984. As well as continuing to publish work by established academics, we are also particularly dedicated to encouraging

new and emerging scholars and graduate students to engage with the journal, recognising its value as a publication that has both national and international standing. Our vision is to maximise possibilities for participation by expanding the range of formats that contributors can use, including shorter ‘op-ed’ pieces, poetry and creative prose, and reports on public events, collaborations, conferences, and community activism based on gender equality and women’s rights. We are especially keen to hear about the feminist research and activism taking place in Aotearoa New Zealand and the wider Pacific region, and invite both academics and activists to share their stories with us. And, as our first year ‘in office’ coincides with the nation’s celebration of 125 years of women’s suffrage, we are planning to make this the focus of a journal issue in 2019.

In this era of ever-expanding social media, we have also been looking at new platforms to spread the word about *WSJ*; earlier this year, we created a Twitter account (@WSJAotearoa) where we can promote the journal to local, national, and global audiences and share relevant news items concerning gender and feminist issues in Aotearoa New Zealand and beyond. We are also currently working with colleagues in the University of Auckland’s Gender Studies department to start recording a number of podcasts and public lectures, where fellow scholars, activists, and graduate students can share their work and research in new media formats. Again, this will provide us with fresh opportunities to disseminate the journal’s important work, and, we hope, will foster innovative conversations and collaborations around feminist scholarship and activism.

As co-editors of a journal whose identity is so firmly rooted in its location in the world, we are aware of the need to sustain this identity, all the while recognising that global politics, policies, and social movements invariably impact women’s experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific. With this in mind, we are currently forging new networks with international researchers, thereby encouraging wider global engagement with and awareness of the unique feminist issues that affect our shores. We also hope that the journal is a space where global feminist and gender-related issues can be explored from both national and international perspectives. Nevertheless, our primary goal for *WSJ* is that it continues to nourish innovative and impactful feminist research in and about Aotearoa New Zealand and our Pacific near neighbours. We also consider it essential that the journal promotes research and engagement with indigenous feminisms and anti-colonial scholarship, and that it embraces Kaupapa Māori, Mātauranga Māori, and a commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

For our first *WSJ* issue, we have gathered together some fascinating research from scholars located in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific, and also those from further afield. Earlier this year, we ran the annual Graduate Student Essay competition, seeking essays on the subject of ‘Studying Feminism in Dangerous Times’ – an apt title, we felt, given recent global and national events. We received a number of highly engaging entries that tackled this theme from diverse disciplinary perspectives, including history, English literature, and sociology. After much deliberation, we chose Seònaid Espiner’s essay as our 2018 prize winner: ‘Having it all in one place: Feminism and capitalism in Ellen Bravo’s “Not a favour to women: The workplace in a feminist future”’. Seònaid considers feminist entanglements with patriarchy and capitalism using Ellen Bravo’s short story as the focus of her inquiry. The essay is thought provoking, well researched, and beautifully written – a worthy winner indeed. We have also included our two runners up to the essay competition in this issue, as we felt that both authors – Ruby Alexander and Sally Crawford – demonstrated a unique and engaging approach to studying feminist issues in dangerous times.

The ‘dangerous’ theme of our essay competition has also served as a wider focus for this issue, and a number of our contributors engage with the topic of gender-based violence from

national and international perspectives. In their comprehensive report, Ramona Boodoosingh, Melanie Beres, and David Tombs explore the social, cultural, and religious systems that serve to sustain the nation's troublingly high rates of gender-based violence. With a recent report indicating that 60% of Samoan women have experienced spousal abuse (Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, 2017), there remains an urgent need to investigate both the causes of gender violence and the means to prevent it. Boodoosingh et al. focus particularly on the role of the Christian church in Samoa, noting its complicity in perpetuating gender inequalities *and* its undeniable potential as a source of positive change.

The work carried out by Boodoosingh et al. has arisen from a project funded by the New Zealand Institute for Pacific Research, titled 'Tatala le ta'ui le Atua: Rolling out the fine mat of scripture'. This project, which began in 2017, has been initiated by a team of researchers affiliated with the Universities of Auckland and Otago, and the National University of Samoa. Led by Dr Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko and Professor David Tombs, the team have investigated how Samoan churches can participate in wider national efforts to tackle gender-based violence. Their work has included a number of conferences and conversations with colleagues in Samoa, Fiji, and Aotearoa New Zealand, and Dr Ah Siu-Maliko has spent time developing and testing educational resources that Samoan churches can use to foster dialogue about gender-based violence. As a member of the NZIPR project team, Caroline Blyth has written a short report about the project, using as her focus a conference presentation by Ah Siu-Maliko, which, as Blyth admits, 'captures so beautifully the aims, motivations, and challenges of the wider "Tatala le ta'ui a le Atua" project, not to mention the vital role that Ah Siu-Maliko has played in shaping the philosophy that underpins it'. The conference ('Tatala le ta'ui a le Atua: Church responses to gender violence in Samoa') took place at the University of Auckland's Fale Pasifika on 11 June 2018, and sought to initiate new conversations between academics, church pastors, and community activists about the churches' role in tackling violence against women.

Continuing the conversation about institutional responses to gender-based violence, Carisa Showden considers the role of *educational* institutions in tackling this issue in her report on the 2018 hui organised by the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association (ANZSSA) at the University of Auckland. The hui, titled 'Preventing and responding to sexual harassment and assault', focused on the 'Respect. Now. Always.' campaign organised by the Australian university sector. Delegates from the University of Sydney and Universities Australia spoke about the background to this campaign and their experiences of implementing strategies in universities to prevent sexual violence, educate people about it, and support those affected by it. As Showden demonstrates, the hui offered much food for thought, reminding the audience of the urgent need for universities worldwide to tackle sexual violence both on and off campus. It also raised some important questions about the responsibilities of universities here in Aotearoa New Zealand to follow the Australian lead and confront this issue.

Another contribution to this special section of the journal comes from Johanna Stiebert, who considers the current 'debate' (within feminist and non-feminist camps) about the phenomenon of rape culture. Stiebert focuses on one particular writer, Luke Gittos, whose book, *Why rape culture is a dangerous myth* (2015), attempts to dismantle the reality of rape culture, arguing that it does not exist except in the minds of feminists and the media who are intent on fuelling a moral panic around rape. While Gittos is writing within a UK context, Stiebert's careful analysis of this book demonstrates that such a denial of rape culture has global implications, including here in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Moving away from 'dangerous times', this issue of *WSJ* also contains some other fascinating pieces of work, including a new format that we intend to feature regularly in the journal: the interview. Kirsten Locke has interviewed one of the incoming Chief Editors of *NORA*:

*The Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, Dr Rebecca Lund. This interview provides an interesting window into the issues and challenges facing feminist scholarship in the Nordic context. Dr Lund's research deals with the issue of epistemic injustice, and the interview explores the ways she intends to reflexively incorporate this research stance into the publishing agenda of the journal by ensuring marginal and marginalised voices are 'heard' through this publishing platform. Importantly also from our perspective, Dr Lund interrogates the masculinised and corporatised structures of publishing in academia and the small forms of resistance a journal prioritising feminist politics can make in subverting these structures of publishing power.

Finally, another contribution to this issue of *WSJ* explores themes of women's embodiment and their experiences of social stigma. Olivia Hall offers us a fascinating account of her research into the experiences of self-identifying fat women in Aotearoa New Zealand. In particular, she focuses on these women's engagements with sex and sexuality, noting the societal pressures they encounter when situated at the intersection of being both fat and a woman. Women appear fated to be judged for what they look like, and this can have a negative impact on their sense of self and their sexuality. Yet, as Hall notes, self-acceptance is a powerful weapon that fat women use to tackle social stigma. In dangerous times, we commit ourselves to battling the social injustices that surround us, but must remain always mindful of the resources we have deep within ourselves that give us the strength to keep fighting.

Aroha nui,

**Caroline Blyth, Kirsten Locke, Yvonne Underhill-Sem, and Suzanne Woodward**