

## 'Little paroxysms of rage': A conversation about academia and feminism with Professor Alison Jones

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### Abstract

This is an interview with Professor Alison Jones, who began her academic career as a tutor in 1978 and then started working as a lecturer of feminist theory in education at the University of Auckland in 1986. I (Kirsten Locke) chose to talk to Alison about her experiences of being a feminist in the academy, knowing her time at the university has spanned four decades of change. Alison, a Pākehā, is now a professor in Te Puna Wānanga, School of Māori and Indigenous Education at the Faculty of Education and Social Work, where she focuses on Māori-Pākehā relationships. Alison is well known amongst her peers and students for her scholarship, her award-winning teaching, and her brave and outspoken views.

My sincere thanks to Alison, who spoke to me in a conversation that spanned two days in late October 2019. Alison worked with this script's final form and was supportive of the project throughout the process. Dr Charlotte Johnson helped edit the 25,000-word conversation into a manageable form. Charlotte came to this project through the staff mobility fund during the COVID-19 lockdown. Her work was so important that I suggested to Alison that Charlotte be listed as an author. Of course, Alison said yes.

### Keywords

*Pākehā, education, critical (theory and perspectives), feminism, rage, academic friendship*

### Introduction

An encounter with Alison Jones is a lively affair. Conversations are peppered with casual theoretical references, discussion gauntlets are often thrown down, wickedly funny anecdotes are told, all delineated by red-framed glasses that hold a penetrating gaze at once inquisitive and demanding. As a part of the *WSJ* interview project, Alison was always in my sights. Not only because her academic career spans a pivotal and stirring period of feminist activism in the university and wider society, but for the way Alison has remained intellectually and personally interesting. Hers is not an academic life built on calculated judgements of status and promotion, although they have both been achieved. Instead, what comes across when talking to Alison is her career-long focus on connecting with people. Her approach to education, teaching and research has been built on relationships and the philosophical meaning of pedagogy as educational interaction, where transformation is reciprocal. The emotive and affective dimensions of the messy interconnectedness of any encounter are always present when Alison is talking about her research and teaching, which are inseparable activities.

This form of pedagogical intensity and interconnectedness was in full flight the two mornings that Alison spoke to me in her small office in Te Puna Wānanga, School of Māori and Indigenous Education, at the Faculty of Education and Social Work. When discussing her formative years as a young tutor, academic and lecturer, Alison dug out photos of the first feminist theory classes she taught. These black and white photos of young women sitting earnestly, surrounded by books and writing implements, show Alison in action mode as she

engages her students in what looks like intense and stimulating discussion. At the point in the interview where Alison is showing me the photos, I tell her that it's so hard not to feel a slight nostalgia for this time in the late 1970s and early 1980s – in education, and in the history of the university. There is a vitality and energy present in these photos that radiates not just from young people thinking hard and standing at the precipice of unknowable adult lives filled with possibility, but also a sense of a time when – in my romantic imagination anyway – the university heaved with the restless intellectual ferment of all those baby boomers demanding more for themselves, for equality, for Māori, for women. It all seemed like a bright thread of hope and dynamism was woven into the fabric of the university; when activism was as much of a university pursuit as attending lectures and being curious about the world. And Alison, of course, has always been in the thick of it.

What follows is an attempt to capture some of the coordinates of an academic life shaped by a relentless drive to understand power and make injustice visible. Throughout the interview, Alison refers to her anger at many things, but primarily at narrow-mindedness and apathy. There is a theme running throughout the discussion that shows this anger as affective and productive. From learning not to try and play the white saviour to Māori girls in state care, to the police's abuses of power in the Springbok protests, to the structural inequalities encountered by women – Māori and Pasifika women in almost all areas of life but in particular education – Alison has channelled this rage into her writing and intellectual essence. Part of what makes Alison and her research so fascinating and important is that while what motivates her has remained constant, her form of argumentation has undergone a series of renewals. From Marxist perspectives, feminism, poststructuralism and latterly a turn to indigenous ontologies, new materialism and educational history, Alison's work traverses a dynamic and changing landscape. It is hard to avoid the conclusion, by the end of the interview, that this landscape has not only affected Alison and her academic trajectory, but also has itself been changed and reshaped by someone who was always going to carve out her own way of being in academia. As this interview attests, this hasn't been achieved without cost.

## Interview

***KL: I would like to know, and I'm sure the readers would as well, how, as a feminist activist scholar, you have negotiated academia.***

AJ: In the early 1970s as a science undergraduate I was already a bit of an activist, though feminism had not really dawned in New Zealand, at least for me. During the Bachelor of Science degree at Massey University, we had to practice what was called sterile technique using fertile eggs. You had to remove part of the shell and there were just a few little cells that were developing the wing buds and leg buds of a foetal chick and we had to use a scalpel to take off the legs and the wings and swap them around... If the cells kept developing and didn't go rotten then you had practiced sterile technique. It wasn't that I minded doing it – that wasn't the problem. The problem was that we never discussed the ethics of what we were doing. A friend and I boycotted the lab classes, demanding that the course discussed ethics. The lecturers said, 'Well, we don't do ethics. Go over to arts, go to philosophy if you are interested'. I did, and I loved the philosophy of science, and philosophy in general.

My science lecturers wanted me to go onto postgraduate work, but in those days the women in science around me were what we cruelly used to call 'old maids'. They didn't seem interesting (though they probably were), they weren't sexy, they were kind of frumpy in their

white coats. They were usually in the background, setting up the labs or looking after the herbarium. This was in the days before popular science writing, before public environmentalism, and before women scientists were even really visible. So, I was quite conscious of being in a male world even though my consciousness didn't come from any external ideology, I was just aware of it. I think, in those days, it was very hard for a woman – especially an assertive young woman like me who wanted to be in control of things – to be happily in science in New Zealand. I was interested in animal behaviour, the field of ethology, so I could have become a biologist but I could not imagine being a scientist in ways that excited me, in New Zealand at least, and it did not occur to me to go overseas.

Then I came to Auckland, following a boyfriend. I got a job as a science teacher. In the summer holidays of 1975, not long before teaching started, I literally walked into the school down the road, Takapuna Grammar School, presented myself to the principal and said, 'I've got a newly minted BSc, straight A's, have you got a job for me?' He said, 'As it happens, we do. We have a woman on maternity leave, can you teach science for a year?' I had no teacher training. I was basically just given textbooks to follow so I could stay a week ahead of the students! I liked the kids, especially in the 'lower' forms, but that experience put me off school teaching for life. I was constantly having to discipline the students for wearing jewellery, or their uniforms not being right ... And there was corporal punishment at that stage. It was pretty barbaric.

The principal said I should go to teachers' college. Teachers' colleges were bastions of boringness to me. And I rather arrogantly thought that being a teacher was 'just a woman's job', involving a lot of tidying kids up one way or another. I didn't have any critique of 'women's work' then, I just knew I did not want to do it. Neither did I want to be a scientist. I had no thoughts of a personal career at that stage.

***KL: Where do you think that desire to stand above 'women's work' came from?***

AJ: Maybe it stemmed from my awareness of social hierarchy. My family were lower middleclass I suppose; my father worked as an accountant for hospitals (not a high-status position in those days) in a series of small New Zealand towns. I just wanted something different from what I was brought up with, something greater. I was called a tomboy; I wasn't a feminine girl. As I got older, people assumed I was a boy. Right up into my early 20s. I was kind of flat chested and outspoken, I wore my hair short, no makeup, et cetera ... and then some assumed I would be a lesbian. As it happens, I am not a lesbian. I like men sexually, though not so much socially! My memory is that, as a child, I was unimpressed with the people around me – except for Māori, who were always doing something interesting, though my deeper interest in Māori did not fully develop until later.

...

After teaching at Takapuna Grammar I went to live in Tonga for a few weeks, as it happened, because I knew someone, a marine biologist, who lived there. When I returned to New Zealand I got another temporary teaching job, this time at Bollard Avenue Girls Home in Avondale, Auckland. Bollard was basically a borstal (youth detention centre) for 12- to 15-year-old girls. I saw the benefits for those girls of being in those places. We've heard a lot about children being abused in state care, but aside from one or two very bad incidents, on the whole, the girls liked their life in Bollard because they were with mates: they ate together, slept together, hung out together. They were mostly Māori and Pacific kids. The women staff were generally kind to them. They were (mostly) safe from the abuse some of them experienced at home. Some were allowed to attend the on-site two-roomed school where I taught with a maximum

ratio of eight students per teacher. They were an interesting lot. I got politicised from that experience because, through my conversations with the girls, I came to understand much more intimately the lives of working-class Māori families in the city. I could see that these girls were not just ‘wastrels’ and ‘hopeless cases’. They were intelligent kids, who had had a hard life and were doing the very best they could strategically to negotiate their lives. So, I learned a hell of a lot in those months about social inequality, and about girls who had very different experiences from mine.

***KL: And was that the motivation to go back to university?***

AJ: No, I went back to university to do postgraduate study because I didn’t know what else to do. I had saved some money, and a university education was pretty much free in those days. I knew someone visiting Auckland who said, ‘Look, I’m going to see a friend of mine at the University of Auckland, why don’t you come along?’. The friend happened to be Jim Marshall, a handsome young man who taught philosophy of education. He talked about his philosophical ideas about discipline and punishment, which he was writing about at that time, and he encouraged me to enrol with him. To be honest, I did not want to go into education – again because I thought it was rather low in the hierarchy of disciplines. But because I was intrigued by ‘the philosophy of’ anything, I thought, ‘Okay, that will suit me for the time being’. So, I studied philosophy of education for my master’s degree, which was a critique of objectivity in educational research.

***KL: Was feminism around at the University by then?***

AJ: This was the late 70s and feminist activism was just beginning to intensify in Auckland. Feminism gave me a language to articulate what I had seen and felt in my own life. I got involved in a range of actions such as putting up political posters around town, marching in protests and publishing a radical newspaper. I was actively involved in what was called ‘radical feminism’. We believed that patriarchy was the fundamental power structure and – basically – all men benefited and all women suffered under this social structure. That binary thinking (women good; men bad) was very powerful and energising, but I soon became critical of such simple philosophies. A lot of groups split out from under the ‘all women are oppressed’ banner – including lesbians, socialists and what were called ‘Black Women’ who were Māori and Pacific women and ‘women of colour’. All of these groups were critical of the idea of a universal sisterhood dominated by what they saw as either heterosexual, middle class or racist assumptions.

In the 80s there was plenty of feminist activism on the university campus. It ranged from women’s studies women who were trying to get taken seriously, to the establishment of women-only spaces, through to women who were literally beating up men. It was a busy, exciting and stressful time. I was appalled by the physical attack carried out by radical feminists on Mervyn Thompson who was a left-wing playwright and lecturer in English. I became increasingly critical of aspects of radical feminist theory that I felt overlooked complexities. In fact, for my PhD, I was going to critique theories underpinning women’s studies as a field of study. I got started into the project and interviewed some stalwarts of the Women’s Studies Association but I realised quickly I couldn’t do that research. Ours was such a small community and, at that time, you just could not rock the boat. I had a huge desire for our ideas to grow and develop but critique is too often read as criticism, so it felt like a really dangerous thing to do personally and politically, and so I pulled the plug on that project.

I became a tutor for Jim's big stage-one course. I think it was called 'History and philosophy of education'. I still was not thinking about having an academic career particularly, but I loved teaching at university. It wasn't rule bound, then, in the way that schools were.

**KL:** *Weren't there some pretty questionable sexual politics going on at this time between male lecturers and young female students?*

AJ: There were two things going on. There were a few male lecturers (and I include professors here) who were unreconstructed sleazy creeps, and then there were the women who were actively having sex with the better ones. Some people like to say that the male lecturers having sex with students were predators, but as a woman student I did not see the men as always the most powerful in these situations. Some young women were active in pursuing their lecturers. For some, it was an exciting sport.

I became really interested in (and wrote about) the complex power plays between the lecturer and the student, the seduction of good teaching, how good teaching is about turning someone on, and the complexity of all those emotions. Of course, these days, we teachers have to have professional distance. We are not to be emotionally engaged with our students and we certainly don't spend our weekends or lunchtimes sitting around debating with them. I get frustrated with some feminist analyses ... any social movement whether it is focused on race, class or whatever ... that tell sanitised, simplified stories in order to avoid some of the contradictions and hard questions about the politics of everyday practice and people's behaviour. I do not see these hard questions as weakening us, but strengthening our ability to embrace the complexity of social movements.

**KL:** *Were there other difficult things about this period for you as an activist?*

AJ: Well, I was intimidated by the police violence at protests. During the Springbok Tour protests in 1981, when my friend and I had little babies, the men in our households and our neighbours would tape themselves into body armour made out of cardboard tubes and wear their motorcycle helmets to protect themselves from the police. It was terrifying because you didn't know whether they were going to get really badly injured by the police or by a riot. I was quite pleased to have a baby and stay on the fringes.

I also got heartily sick of the jibes coming at feminists – we were all lesbians, hairy legged, ugly, couldn't get a man. These comments sound dumb now, but this sort of verbal crap was common. I was in a permanent state of mutinous rage about men and male power, male students and lecturers and leaders in the university, in parliament, in the media, and on it went. You couldn't move without men having an opinion. That was bloody tiring I have to say.

When I look back, I feel sorry for my partner at the time. He had to put up with a lot. I was away often, out at political meetings, we had a small baby, and I was often angry – not just at men, but also at other feminists whose analyses I found frustratingly over-simplified. I'm not an exactly laid-back type, though I'd like to be!

...

**KL:** *When did you get a permanent academic position and why?*

AJ: In 1985 a lectureship came up in the Education Department where I was by then completing my PhD, a Marxist ethnography of a group of Pacific Island girls' final year at a local school. Marxist analysis was the dominant radical analysis in the social sciences then. I

had embarked on a PhD largely because I had no better alternative and I enjoyed university life. I got a scholarship too, and at \$9,000 a year it was just enough to support my partner and baby son.

Education was a department within the Faculty of Arts at the University of Auckland in those days. Marie Clay was the head of department. She was the university's first woman promoted to professor, and the country's first female professor of education. Despite being a pioneer in these terms, she was a conservative when it came to feminism, and even told me that she had made it, and had a family, without any special attention, so why couldn't other women?

I applied for the job – why? Because it was there! – but Marie and the vice-chancellor were very anxious about letting me in, as a known feminist. I remember seeing the word 'feminist' written in handwriting on my application, in Marie Clay's office. I did get the job though they tried (unsuccessfully) to not allow the position to be a permanent one. I had to visit the acting vice-chancellor to make my case, and I remember being deliberately vague about my knowledge of feminist politics in the university to reduce my apparent threat.

***KL: How was it, being a feminist lecturer?***

AJ: When I became a lecturer in Education in 1986, my PhD supervisor Colin Lankshear, a Marxist educationist, let me contribute a section on feminist theory to his large stage-one course. And I initiated a new stage-three course, which I called 'Feminist perspectives in education'. I had to argue with my colleagues in Education for that paper (they were called 'papers' then).

The Education Department was not a very happy place, but never dull. The academic staff were divided into those who taught 'the psychology of education' and those who were in the 'history, philosophy and sociology of education'. I would say it was an ideological split, but no doubt the psychologists would say *we* were political and ideological, and *they* were scientific and evidence-based. It was quite a small department, about 18 of us, and we used to vote on things – like whether to develop a new course – along party lines. It was always so close that if people were on leave, they insisted on having their proxy vote recorded. I argued for a feminist theory paper and some of the psychologists said, 'Why do we need it?' I said, 'Do we ever talk about women in this place?' They said, 'Yes: mothers. Child development centres on mothers ...' I said, 'I rest my case'. I think I argued that feminist theory was a *thing*, now, in international universities. Sue Middleton at Waikato had already got feminist theory into Education there the year before. Anyway, my proposal squeaked through and I went ahead with the course, the first feminist theory course in Education at Auckland.

That first year that 'Feminist perspectives in education' ran, I got some marvellous students, including Kuni Jenkins, Eve Coxon and Linda Tuhiwai Smith. We worked closely together, critically thinking through all the aspects of feminism, the different feminisms. One student did a photo essay of the class that year for her assignment. I have it here. I love it. I wish I had done more to document our pedagogy in those days. [*Alison gets out a large hard-covered book filled with photographs and some photocopied handwriting*].

**KL:** *Is that you here? [Points to photograph – see Figure 1].*

AJ: That's me, I was skinny and had long hair then. Here is Linda [Tuhiwai Smith; see Figure 2], here is Kuni [Jenkins]. We were a group really studying together, engaged in quite powerful shared pedagogy. I seriously started learning from my students.

**KL:** *How old were you?*

AJ: I had my first child at 28, then did the PhD, which was agonising and took me ages, then I got the job as a lecturer, so I must have been about 34 by then.

Here is Linda's written comment [*reads*]:

I am Linda. I am taking this course because the alternatives do not appeal [*laughs*]. I have little background in feminist philosophies, I see myself as a Māori having a Māori perspective, but I still want to know what these feminist ideas are about because sometimes Māori and feminists are on the same wavelength and sometimes we seem miles apart.

**Figure 1: Alison teaching.**



**Figure 2: Linda Tuhiwai Smith, left, in Alison's class**



I was introduced to Māori perspectives through students like Linda and Kuni. I was teaching Graham Smith as well, he sat in on my stage-two course called ‘History of ideas in education’, or something like that.

***KL: So this was before Linda and Graham were lecturers?***

AJ: Yes. At that time, Māori education as a field of study did not exist in the university. Māori studies at the University of Auckland was still considered part of Anthropology.

My colleague Stuart McNaughton and I successfully lobbied for the establishment of a new position – in ‘Māori education’. Linda and Graham, both school teachers studying for their masters degrees, shared that position for, I think, a year. They worked so hard, and it became two positions. Everything took off from there.

Linda and Graham, and Kuni, and Eve (who worked in Pacific education), all eventually got their PhDs. I had worked alongside colleagues like Stuart, and later Roger Dale, to get them permanent positions in Education.

***KL: They all got academic positions?***

AJ: Yes. In those days, it was the mid-80s, things were changing fast in the university. In Education we were responding to the political and social demands from students and radical academics, nationally and internationally. Identity politics and new academic critiques were such that we in Education could no longer simply get away with courses on child development, for instance, that did not recognise the impact of culture, history and power. There was more money around then in the universities, too; we had plenty of students, and our staff numbers grew. In the university, academics had quite a lot of autonomy, we made decisions amongst ourselves in our respective departments. We could decide, within reason, whom to employ, what and how to teach, and how to assess our courses. We fought a lot amongst ourselves, but there was a sense of us academics being in control of it all.

It is all so different now. Academics’ power has diminished considerably. Our power has been handed over to administrators and managers. I loathe the administrative power structures that now run universities, and the digital systems that dominate our academic lives.

***KL: It is hard for me and the generation below you in Education not to romanticise your era***

...

AJ: I romanticise it myself.

***KL: ... there is a sense of missing out on the best time, the time that actually made a difference before the university became an administrative, bureaucratic minefield. And then, of course, the turn to neoliberalism broadly happened.***

AJ: The shift when theory, I mean social theory, fell out of favour in Education and was largely killed off, happened quite quickly. Some of us in Education were busy critiquing the role of schools in maintaining – reproducing – the capitalist social and economic order, patriarchy, racism. We were critics – that’s basically what we did. My colleagues the psychologists, rather than critiquing the system, were trying to make it *work better*, for kids to be more successful, for children to learn more efficiently, and so on, at least that’s how they saw it. So, we were



seen as only concerned with political theory; they were seen as getting to grips with practice. We, too, wanted different practical outcomes but argued that the economic system and its schooling system needed a radical overhaul, not a bit of fiddling or adjusting.

Of course, those who wanted better outcomes within the existing order came out on top. Neoliberalism's demand for public accountability for public spending, and its emphasis on the positive possibilities within capitalism, meant less tolerance by the end of the 1990s for leftist political critique in Education. Conservatives were asking, 'Why are we spending millions of dollars on Marxists and radicals who are just pontificating, thumbing their noses at society, talking about deschooling and revolution?' It was a short step to, 'Yes, we see there are problems, but stop theorising and start providing practical solutions, with measurable effects that will work on Monday'. We have seen now how the arts as an entire enterprise has come under pressure for these reasons, while business schools have appeared and strengthened.

The once-intense interest in writing, talking and teaching about theory shifted, and was dropped almost overnight. It was fast becoming unfashionable, and the teachers and schools just felt battered by it. I felt sorry for the teachers – they had a hard time from us. As Marxists and feminists, we were critical of schooling. The teachers were wailing, 'We're doing our best but you still say we are agents of the State, and perpetuating inequality'. Some of the academics, including me, in the Education Department pointed out that being an agent of the State is the fate of schools, their function in capitalism – don't cry about it, understand it!

Then (given we supposedly had all the research-based answers), it was argued that we in Education at the university should train teachers, which we had not been interested in doing up until that point. I guess it was a sort of snobbery – we did the thinking, the teachers' colleges did the training. I certainly did not want us to train teachers en masse. I was interested in education, not just schools and school teachers. I was interested in social theory, new ways of thinking, critique, not 'how to get kids better off in classrooms'. Plus, I have never believed that schools, in general, can do anything radical in terms of social change, because ultimately their patterns of reward simply reflect underlying economic patterns of reward. (... I always have to interrupt myself at this point, because I do think Māori-led schooling has had a social impact; that's a slightly different story.)

Anyhow, the universities' demand to make research-based practice the norm in schools contributed to the government's decision that universities were to educate student teachers. Auckland University amalgamated with the Auckland College of Education (the teachers' college), bringing them, with us, into a new faculty, the Faculty of Education. Social theory, politics, history, and philosophy, as flagship subjects in Education, pretty much faded away at that point.

...

***KL: In terms of leadership, you've been active in academic leadership. Can you talk a little about this?***

AJ: In terms of formal leadership in the university hierarchy, I was offered a temporary position as Pro-Vice Chancellor (PVC) Equity in about 2000, when I became an associate professor. Honestly, when I took up that position, I was so ignorant about the structure of the university! I had no idea how many faculties there were. I barely knew what a faculty was. My friend Graham Smith was by then the PVC Māori. During that period, along with the Māori scholar Michael Walker, I managed to initiate the Tuākana programme, and the Chancellor's Awards for Top Māori and Pacific students, and some other programmes. But I found that role too politically challenging. As a Pro-Vice Chancellor, I had to be a voice for the

university, defending it against external criticism about equity and, at the same time, I had to try to represent the interests of those who were inside the university and critical of it.

I could see the importance of working at higher leadership levels in the university, making good policies and developing progressive aims for the institution. I told myself: 'If I am really interested in social change, I have to be at the top to have impact'. But I discovered I just do not have the emotional fortitude for it. I get too angry, too conflicted and stressed, too bossy, my expectations are too high. I found that I much prefer working closer to the ground, with 'ordinary' people rather than those around the top table. I'm a critic, basically. So, I did not go that leadership route. Thank god I don't have to make the kinds of compromises that high status leaders have to make. I know how hard it is to be a leader of a complex organisation.

My leadership, such as it is, I think, comes mainly from my relationships with people on the ground, encouraging them to write well, to think well and to argue well. And these days I lead (in partnership with a Māori colleague) what I see as an important programme, called Te Akoranga Kairangi, for Pākehā and non-Māori university staff, about the politics of being Pākehā, how the Treaty is our Treaty too, our history in New Zealand, our relationships with Māori.

***KL: You do not appear to be emotionally unsuited to leadership! You come across as confident, informed and a little scary.***

AJ: I know I have a reputation for not being afraid to speak my mind, and as a rather scary person. I think I learned when I was a student, and also as an academic, scariness is a form of female power. Female power is an interesting thing. Men do get scared of women who are assertive, and that is not a bad thing! There are different mechanisms of female power. When I was young I was not averse to a bit of flirting, even, where necessary.

I always see everything in political terms, that is, in terms of power relations ... that is the filter through which I see the world and it informs everything I do. So, I have to make an effort to be cheerful sometimes!

I remain very conscious of gender. I notice in meetings when men, who may be in the numerical minority, dominate and ask and answer the questions. Some of my feminist snippiness is addressed at that continuing dynamic. I think when you are my age (66) and a bit stropy, you're called a feminist. To younger people, it's almost an old-fashioned thing to be.

I am also conscious of the social dynamics of social class and ethnicity. I have an allergic reaction to people with an upper class-based ring of confidence about them. It is unfair, but I do. I'm not denying that I'm utterly middle class with my part-time professorial salary, expensive glasses and inner-city house. But in terms of confidence, I don't see myself as having class confidence. I have a bolshie, political confidence which is teeth-gritting, emotional and determined rather than a natural class-based assurance. If you have to learn confidence for yourself, rather than gaining it through your upbringing, that gives you a certain angry edge.

***KL: So how did you feel when you made professor? Was it a milestone in a psychological sense, did it come at the right time?***

AJ: I only really applied for promotion to professor because others encouraged me to. And because of the men who were getting professorships around me. I was thinking, 'If he can get it, bloody hell, I should have got it ages ago'. Before I applied, I made sure that I was going to be successful. There were women that I met at overseas conferences who became my role

models and mentors. Patti Lather, Maggie Maclure, Bettie St Pierre, Erica McWilliam, Gaby Weiner, Deb Britzman, Alison Lee ... They were all professors, all slightly older than me, a bit ahead, and I watched them operating at conferences. I liked them, and I made friends with them, and they became my supporters and referees.

One told me, 'You have to have a game plan if you are going to become a professor – and you have to be a professor'. She said, 'Don't even think you're not doing it. You have to become professor because women have to push on up.' She worked out a promotion plan with me which was really helpful.

**KL:** *And once you achieved this, what effect did it have on your identity as a feminist and academic?*

AJ: Well, you'd think I would be happy. But I got the promotion just as the university amalgamated with the teachers' college. I was depressed about the amalgamation because I thought, 'Oh great, I'm a professor now, I've got to turn up at faculty meetings, I've got to be a leader in a faculty I don't even want to be in'. I do believe professors should be active in contributing to leadership, but I found it hard to even think about how to contribute as a professor to the Faculty of Education. I am just not interested in 'best practice', or 'quality teaching leads to quality outcomes', which has to be one of the great tautologies of our time.

Depression runs in my family. It's a condition my father had, and a grandmother. I was having therapy, dealing with my little paroxysms of rage, and sadness too. It was only when I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2008 that I became psychologically better. Rather than letting the neoliberal university, the anti-intellectual faculty and the pragmatic teacher training get on top of me, I decided to liberate myself from it. I had a year off for treatment. My hair fell out and I had radiotherapy. But that threat to my life clarified a lot for me. I made a clear decision that I wasn't coming back to the university full time. In other words: a part-time professor I could be, but a full-time professor I couldn't be.

And I wanted to write. I could not make a full-time academic job in the Faculty of Education work for me as a writer-researcher, despite the fact that 40 percent of our time is supposedly for research.

I love the life I have now (and it is mandatory to say it: I am very aware of my privileges). I have time to write, I supervise and do some teaching. I play a strong role in Te Puna Wānanga with the graduate students, I run academic writing workshops, I'm available to all my colleagues as an adviser and I'm very active. I have good friends at the university. I can do my work in a way I enjoy, even though I dislike the hideous, time-consuming, inefficient online systems we are now forced to use. To be honest, I am pleased I am not starting my academic career now. The university has become quite grim; our power over our own work as academics has been seriously curtailed, and so younger academics feel they are on a rat wheel.

Over the years, colleagues invited me to apply for academic positions overseas. I never wanted to go. My heart is here in Aotearoa, in my relationships – deep and real relationships I have with the land, with the Māori women and men I know, and many Pākehā as well. I am still as much a feminist as always, and more fiercely protective of the academy for all its faults. When I got my PhD, I did not graduate in person because I thought the gown and the title were elitist. Now I am proud of the gown and the title, and I defend the academy and its production of knowledge and – to the extent it happens – the space the university can provide for critical thinking. We need that now more than ever.

**KL:** *Alison, thank you so much for your time.*

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