

Participatory Action Research - Feminist Trailblazers and Good Troublemakers

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Transcript. Host Patricia Maguire with Naomi Joy Godden, Trimita Chakma, and Kavita Naidu: EcoFeminist Participatory Action Research and Planetary Health (No 13) (Audio podcast transcript) (No.13, Season 2, Episode). Original Broadcast Date August 31, 2023.

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[00:00:00] Patricia: Hi. Welcome back to the Participatory Action Research Feminist Trailblazers and Good Troublemakers Podcast. And we're thrilled you're back with us for the first episode of Season Two.

I'm your host, Patricia Maguire. Our podcast elevates the contributions of feminist trailblazers to participatory and action research, and we talk with trailblazers about their successes and their struggles bringing feminist values and ways of being to the diverse iterations of PAR. Our intention is to promote action research that's deeply informed by intersectional feminisms and connected to PAR's radical roots.

Today our guests are Dr. Naomi Joy Godden, Trimita Chakma, and Kavita Naidu. Their work brings together the worlds of climate justice, social activism, and Feminist Participatory Action Research. And we're going to dive into their theory and practice of EcoFeminist Participatory Action Research, but first, let me say some welcomes here. Naomi, welcome to the show.

[00:01:18] Naomi: Thanks for having me.

[00:01:20] Patricia: Trimita, welcome.

[00:01:21] Trimita: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

[00:01:23] Patricia: And Kavita, it's great to have you too.

[00:01:26] Kavita: Thank you. I'm really looking forward to this.

[00:01:28] Patricia: Let me start with some introductions. Dr. Naomi Joy Godden is the Vice Chancellor's Research Fellow and senior lecturer at the Center for People, Place, and Planet at Edith Cowan University in Bunbury, Wardandi Boodja, Western Australia. Naomi has 20 years of experience in community development and Feminist Participatory Action

Research or FPAR for Social and Ecological Justice, and she's the co-founder and chair of Just Home Margaret River, [00:02:00] which is a grassroots organization for housing justice, and she's been an elected Councillor for Margaret River.

At the Center for People, Place, and Planet, Naomi and her colleagues collaborate with civil society organizations, social movements, and communities to undertake FPAR for Climate Justice. Some of her current projects include embedding a climate justice lens in community service organizations, supporting First Nations peoples and marginalized communities to demand a just and inclusive transition from fossil fuels, strengthening the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in a changing climate, and enhancing girl-led activism for climate justice in the Pacific.

[00:02:48] Patricia: Trimita Chakma is a feminist researcher and a human rights advocate for the Indigenous Chakma Hill tribe of Bangladesh. And for over 12 years, she has advocated for women's rights and collaborated with literally hundreds of grassroots activists across Asia, the Pacific region, and Africa to utilize FPAR tools on issues as diverse as climate justice, labor, migration, land rights, and trade and economic justice. And Trimita has a strong background in information technology, which I think she probably put to use in part when she founded the online Feminist Participatory Action Research Academy. She's a member of the Kapaeeng Foundation, a human rights organization for the Indigenous Peoples of Bangladesh.

[00:03:38] Patricia: Kavita Naidu is an international human rights lawyer and activist from Fiji. Kavita specializes in feminist climate justice for grassroots women in all their diversity. And with over 16 years of experience working in the Pacific, Asia, and the United Kingdom, Kavita has worked at the Asia Pacific [00:04:00] Forum on Women, Law, and Development, the United Nations Office of the High Commission for Human Rights, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, government bodies, and the private sector.

So let's begin with the background of what brought each of you to Feminist Participatory Action Research, sort of get to the backstory of what and who inspired you.

And Trimita, let's start with you. Tell us about your journey into PAR, feminisms, and climate justice.

[00:04:35] Trimita: My journey to PAR began around 2012 when a tragic incident took place in my hometown in Bangladesh. A young 11 year old girl from my community was brutally killed. So this event moved me deeply and I found myself organizing protests and advocating for legal changes to seek justice for her and her family. It was during this time that I discovered FPAR through the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law, and Development, or APWLD in short. APWLD is a regional feminist movement that works across 27 countries

in Asia and the Pacific to build feminist movements. So they gave us a grant to run an FPAR project on justice for sexual violence against Indigenous women in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, where I'm originally from.

This experience was instrumental in shaping my career today. At the time actually, I was professionally working full-time as an IT manager while volunteering for Kapaeeng Foundation the Indigenous Organization for Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh. After completing my FPAR I made the decision to leave my IT career behind and started working with APWLD. That's around 2014 to support their FPAR program. In fact, this is when I came across your work, Patricia, and I've been a fan since. It's been an incredible journey, and now feminism, PAR and climate justice [00:06:00] are at the heart of everything I do.

[00:06:01] Patricia: Kavita, you're a Pacifica-based lawyer in feminist climate justice advocacy and movement building. I don't typically think of lawyers as researchers. So tell us about your journey to Feminist Participatory Action Research and climate justice.

[00:06:19] Kavita: This is true. I'm a bit of an unusual lawyer. I consider myself to be a movement lawyer. So I grew up in Fiji and I lived through cyclones, but I never quite equated how that would relate to a legal profession. And I suppose for me, the pivotal turning point was Cyclone Winston, a category five cyclone to hit the South Pacific back in 2015. And I remember just watching on the news, with horror, what was unfolding in my tiny island home. My brother and I decided to return to Fiji and do humanitarian relief work. And I think that was the point when I realized that my traditional lawyering seemed quite irrelevant when buildings were being washed away, people were displaced or losing their lives, and the aftermath required a lot of money and services that were non-existent. So I decided to use my human rights background and be part of the movement for climate justice. And APWLD gave me the opportunity to learn from some of the best practitioners in the region on how to use Feminist Participatory Action Research to mobilize grassroots women on feminist climate demands. And I've never looked back.

[00:07:43] Patricia: It sounds like you and Trimita both had pivotal personal experiences that were outside of your professional life, so to speak, that made you just re-look at your professional career and see how you could harness your [00:08:00] professional skills in service to climate justice and feminisms.

Naomi, let's get you in here. You have very deep roots in the Margaret River region of Western Australia, and I've read that you began as a social worker promoting the emancipatory imperative of social work in which you've referenced bell hook's identification of love. Love is a political process to transform systems of injustice, everything from capitalism, patriarchy, racism. So tell us about your journey into FPAR.

[00:08:34] Naomi: I grew up on the lands of the Wardandi Noongar People, Wardandi Boodja it's called. In a little town called Wooditchup or also known as Margaret River. This area is incredibly beautiful for its forests, for its waves, its caves, and very rich biodiversity. And of course it has a really strong community. And so from a young age, I was very much nurtured as an activist for social and environmental justice in this place.

I was also introduced to bell hooks quite young. And remember reading her book *All About Love* and being quite struck by finding, I guess, a framework that helped me to articulate and explain the deep sense of injustice that I feel about the social wrongs in both my community and more broadly. As a young person, I was particularly frustrated by the fact that I had to leave my community in order to study for higher education, and that there were no financial programs that would adequately support me and my friends and peers to be able to do that. And so, of course, being an activist, I wanted to kind of address this issue, not just for myself and my community, but across the country.

[00:09:39] Naomi: I remember a conservative politician in my community suggested that I collect case studies or stories of other young people to be able to put a case to the federal government about the issues around this particular social policy around access to higher education. And so I did exactly that. At 18, I think I collected 180 stories of young [00:10:00] people around the country and then wrote that into this quite big report that was then submitted to the minister - the Federal Minister for Youth and other politicians. And that really kickstarted, I think, my understanding of how I could be gathering evidence and engaging in research to support activism.

[00:10:17] Naomi: Since then, I engaged with a lot of community development processes and always integrating research and grassroots data collection and analysis with communities to help inform and improve our activism and advocacy. But it was while I was studying my PhD, and working at Oxfam that I really discovered Participatory Action Research and understood this as a framing for social change. And it was through this that I also was introduced to APWLD, the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law, and Development, and was lucky enough to meet Trimita, Kavita, and many other women in the region. So, sort of 20 years on, I find myself now very strongly and firmly in the world of Feminist Participatory Action Research. It's a methodology and a process that I think is infused in every part of my being, in my activism, in my community development, in my relationships, in my work as an educator, and in the research I do at the university.

[00:11:18] Patricia: It sounds like what has brought the three of you together, at least to collaborate with each other is the Asia Pacific Women Law and Development group. And what I'd like to do now is let's move to talk about your collective and collaborative work. It seems to me that your FPAR, you're very intentional and overt in your idea that FPAR works

to challenge oppressive systems of power. And in fact, in your introductions, each of you talked about some way that you saw systemic injustice and how that eventually brought you to FPAR.

So let's explore [00:12:00] how FPAR works on the ground, so to speak. Kavita, let's start with you and tell us about some successfully implemented FPAR studies or projects that you worked with, with communities or climate activists in the Pacific.

[00:12:19] Kavita: I'll begin by sharing how all of this began with Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law, and Development. I was leading the Climate Justice FPAR program. And so a core part of that role was to mobilize grassroots women to identify some of the injustices that were happening in their communities and to really shape locally led solutions to challenge oppressive systems of colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism. And so what we used to do, and this still happens in the organization, is identify at least between eight to a dozen grassroots feminist organizations in the region who would become part of a collective group and lead the FPAR research.

And, Trimita and Naomi will talk more about how we do this, but in terms of some specific projects, fundamentally the projects would look at what problems the grassroots women are facing in their communities by reason of climate change, but also how existing inequality, discrimination, and at times violence is being exacerbated by the climate crisis.

And, in the Pacific, APWLD was perhaps one of the first organizations to actually lead FPAR in the Carteret Islands. And the Carteret Islands is in Papua New Guinea, and this case is [00:14:00] probably the world's first on the relocation of entire communities due to rising sea level. And APWLD's research provided the data and evidence of the impacts of rising sea levels, particularly the gendered impacts of rising sea levels on a community that was entirely dependent on their tiny lands and the ocean for the livelihoods. And they were relocated to a larger island quite far from the ocean. And how they then fought to make sure that their livelihoods were protected and then mobilized around lobbying for the things that the government needed to provide because the community realized that they might have been the first, but they weren't going to be the last with the impacts that we're following from rising sea level.

[00:14:54] Kavita: So this group of women did an incredible job and the research is also available about the kind of impacts that they faced and the solutions that they came up with. And the Pacific in general, outside of APWLD, has a very vibrant feminist movement. They're organizations like DIVA and femLINK and Pacific Women Shaping Development and all of them use some form of Feminist Participatory Action Research to lead locally led

feminist solutions on how the culture, environment, women's rights, and gendered oppression work in the Pacific and how to challenge those systems.

They use data collection and sort of analysis that are very much culturally appropriate and relevant to the women who are being worst impacted and at the frontline of challenging what is happening in the Pacific. So there are many, many examples. With DIVA I know they have a huge [00:16:00] network of grassroots women called Women Defend the Commons. And we've worked quite recently, actually, Naomi, Trimita and I, worked in Kiribati and this was during COVID so we actually had to become quite innovative with how we led FPAR because it was all through an online platform. And again, the project we worked with and still continue to work with is called Pacific Girls in a Changing Climate. And again, working across several villages in Kiribati, working with young girls and their mentors to really build their knowledge and also learn ourselves about the gendered impacts of the climate crisis in Kiribati, and for the girls to work collectively and mobilize and really learn about the kind of solutions that they can lead.

[00:16:49] Patricia: What are some examples, Naomi, of you and the groups you've worked with using FPAR in Australia?

[00:16:56] Naomi: So firstly, I think it's important that I recognize that a lot of my training and background in Feminist Participatory Action Research also stems with APWLD. I did my PhD through an FPAR methodology, but it was actually when I was invited to come to APWLD to provide some training in participatory methods to the grassroots researchers and women that I really understood the political and structural imperative of FPAR.

It was a, a quite incredible learning process, really deeply thinking and learning about structural violence, structural injustice, you know, learning about militarism and globalization and fundamentalism from quite a strong feminist socialist perspective. And so that geared my FPAR work into a whole different frame in really thinking about in Australia where there is, you know, it's quite a conservative country, where the climate movement and social movements are, I would say quite conservative [00:18:00] and careful. Thinking about how we could be integrating and embedding an FPAR approach in the way that we engage with activism from a very strong, radical, and structural perspective.

[00:18:12] Naomi: Now, I've been involved in activism for many years in environmental justice, social justice, climate justice, gender justice, and many other areas. In the climate movement in Australia, those of us who come from a feminist climate justice lens feel a lot of frustration about how climate activism is very technical and technocratic, where social justice and human rights, in particular gender justice, are quite marginalized.

So, with some other activists, we decided to embark on a project to try and build consciousness within the climate movement in Australia about feminist climate justice. We managed to get a grant from my university and could employ some activist researchers, so I could employ some activists involved in the movement as activist researchers. And we together co-designed a consciousness raising program for activists about climate justice.

We then rolled that program out online because of course it was COVID, but infused through that a research methodology to really be able to track both the, the content of the discussions around feminist climate justice in the Australian activist movement, as well as, thinking about the impact and effectiveness of the consciousness raising program itself.

Over 150 activists participated in this project, from about 15 different organizations, and it was a really exciting process of, of supporting and engaging with activists as we started to really think about and unpack concepts like colonization and climate change and what it means to advocate for climate justice from a feminist and decolonial lens. Thinking about climate solutions from that feminist perspective. So challenging those kinda [00:20:00] techno-patriarchal approaches to climate responses and coming back to values of, of place, of people, of Country, of community, of care.

[00:20:11] Naomi: So this project is ongoing, of course, as all FPAR is. I think that's a really important point. There's no such thing as a short FPAR project. I really see it as a decade, if not longer of work because it is this infusion of activism and research together to try and strengthen social movements.

Another project that I'm involved in, in, in Western Australia is also, I think, an interesting example of engaging with FPAR for organizational and professional change. So the Western Australian community services sector covers all of the organizations in Western Australia in areas like homelessness, mental health, drug and alcohol, poverty, family violence, and a whole range of other community services. About five years ago, some of the leaders in this sector contacted me. They were concerned that climate change and climate justice weren't really being considered and certainly weren't being advocated by the sector of the broader scale. And so we decided to kickstart an FPAR process within the sector. We gathered the group of 15 CEOs and managers of community sector organizations and had an initial yarn or meeting and discussion about climate justice and what are the potentials and possibilities for trying to embed this into the sector.

[00:21:29] Naomi: We decided that the first process we needed to undertake was some participatory research to understand where the sector was. And so we did some surveys, interviews and workshops across the sector, and then used that to help inform decision

making about what strategies we wanted to take collectively to try and strengthen the climate justice lens in the sector across Western Australia.

Here we are now, three or four years later, we finally received some quite significant funding to be [00:22:00] able to develop tools and resources for community organizations to embed the climate justice lens in their work. And importantly, to be able to engage in an applied research program in partnership with community organizations as they're undergoing the quite significant transformation and change they need to, to be responsive to the realities of climate change for the clients and communities that they work with. So this is a, again, a long, long, a long program of work. But infused through all of this is this idea that research and action are totally intertwined. The cyclical, quite cyclical way of working where knowledge and evidence can inform action, and again, at, at the root, a desire for addressing some of the structural injustices.

[00:22:49] Patricia: Well, I think that both you and Kavita have talked about projects in terms of the long-term nature of them and the continued cyclical nature of the action and the research cycle of one informing the other.

Trimita, let's move over to you. You know, one of the things that we know about activism in general is that it can be quite dangerous for women. And so there are both ethical and safety risks when women engage in FPAR. Tell us a little bit about how you grapple with safety and ethics in FPAR work.

[00:23:29] Trimita: For us, FPAR is a form of feminist political organizing, and it's about confronting oppressive systems head on. Challenging powerful systems such as patriarchy or neo-liberal capitalism can come with serious risks. In our work across Asia and the Pacific we have seen firsthand how some men feel threatened when women are empowered and become community leaders, men fear that these women will become disobedient and challenge the status quo. In some [00:24:00] instances these resistance from men escalated into personal attacks and sadly even threats to honor killings.

When Indigenous Uma women from the Cordillera region of the Philippines resisted Chevron's mega geothermal project on their ancestral land, they have faced military threats and terrors, which were sponsored by the state. Uh, we have also seen women factory workers fighting for labor rights facing police attacks.

In addition, women often have to balance their activism with endless unpaid care work at home which leaves them with very little time for themselves. Uh, so this also adds an extra layer of challenge to their involvement, involvement in FPAR. And when some of these women try to engage with the authorities, they're often ignored, refused access to information or meetings with officials. And let's not forget external hurdles, like harsh

weather conditions which is often induced by the climate crisis and transportation issues and safety of women when they, you know, go outside of their homes, especially in rural areas.

[00:25:08] Trimita: So when we involve women in FPAR, we make sure they're fully aware of these risks. This involves continually assessing and mitigating risks through the FPAR cyclical process. And one of the useful tools is to practice a free prior informed and continuous consent, or FPICC in short, as part of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This is very important in the context of Indigenous People's land rights and decolonial work.

The fact is political organizing work is never risk-free. So we cannot, you know, do meaningful work without facing risks. And this sometimes leads to hesitation for some of the donors to support effort FPAR projects. But we believe that the decision to take risks should be the women's to make, [00:26:00] not for others because it's their journey and their fight. But the important thing is we are prepared and it's, you know, they're well informed ahead of the FPAR project and during, throughout the cycle.

[00:26:12] Patricia: Kavita, you mentioned that in the example that you used the women who were being moved from the coast further inland, I believe you mentioned that the project also did some work with gender-based violence. Can you speak to that a little bit?

[00:26:31] Kavita: Yeah. I mean, the Pacific Islands has some of the world's highest rates of gender-based violence. And Papua New Guinea is, in particular, it's at epidemic levels, the rate of violence. So without climate change, the way patriarchy is ingrained in the cultural, but also the colonial systems always disproportionately puts women at a disadvantage because of the lack of access, equal rights.

So, when a community that is already quite troubled by violence is then forced to relocate, which means that there would be further financial distress, homelessness, loss of access to livelihoods, the men tend to get more violent because, you know, drinking increases, domestic violence increases. And, so it's a culmination of factors both within the society and then once the community starts moving what they face from the host communities. Because a lot of the time when the communities are relocated, they're relocated where there is already an existing community. And when a host community faces competition over resources, [00:28:00] this conflict can also escalate to violence.

And women, again, are disproportionately experiencing violence because they become the first target. In these situations, women are vulnerable because at times they're forced to travel further just to collect food or water. They're left at home if the men migrate to urban centers looking for work, exposing them to greater risks as well. So there's violence within

the families, but also that which they faced by reason of the fact that they are women living in precarious situations in a society that does not necessarily provide the protections that is needed.

And this is going to become an increasing worry as climate change impacts worsen in the region. And we also saw this occurring during the pandemic, during lockdowns violence did increase in the region and particularly across the global south because of the increasing financial distress, but also the burdens that were placed on women and forced to remain at home because of lack of movement. So all of these factors tend to create an extremely volatile situation for women who are already facing extreme risks.

[00:29:20] Patricia: Naomi, you mentioned that one of the things the groups that you were working with were trying to do was to counter a kind of a technicalized approach to climate justice work. And I wonder then if you could keep with this thread here of connecting climate justice work to work to counter gender-based violence. Because that's something I think sometimes people don't really get or think about or make the connection between climate justice work and gender-based violence, the work against that.

[00:29:59] Naomi: There's two helpful ways to look at this. The first is that we know, and there is enormous evidence internationally, that during and after climate events, men's violence against women increases. We've seen that here in Australia. We've seen it across Asia, we've seen it across the Pacific in many, many different parts of the world. And this is quite well documented. And so, because patriarchy is a foundation for climate change, as is capitalism, colonialism, white supremacy, these issues and these structures of these oppressive systems of power exist and form the basis for climate change. And so when a climate event occurs, this is not occurring in a, in a silo or separated from the reality of our context. Climate change is an exacerbation of these existing structural injustices.

And so when a climate event occurs, like a flood or a fire or in, you know, slow onset climate change like a drought, we see social injustices that already existed in our communities due to these structures of injustice worsening. And that's why we know that men's violence against women, which is already a huge issue in our communities, increases and worsens during and after climate events.

But I think there's another frame of thinking about it as well. We understand from an ecofeminist perspective that violence against the land or violence against the environment is directly related to violence against women. [00:31:25] Humans have an interconnected relationship with land. We are not separated from the environment; we are the environment. And so extractive and violent processes like some, you know, mining processes or the clearfelling of forests, pollution, you know, environmental risks and

processes like that manifest in the way that humans treat each other as well as the way they treat the environment.

And so, again, we know that in places that have experienced enormous environmental degradation and [00:32:00] pain, there is also high rates of violence against women because when Country hurts, and this is what Wardandi Elders are telling teaching me here in the, the Wardandi Boodja land that I live on, when Country hurts, when land is hurting, people are hurting and vice-versa because of the beautiful and interconnected relationship that we have with each other.

And so when we think about climate change and we, and we think about the framing of climate justice, it's so important that we understand that we can't just advocate for a reduction in emissions. We must be advocating for and working towards a completely transformed social, economic and political system. We need to dismantle the systems of injustice, of patriarchy, white supremacy, colonialism, neoliberal capitalism. We must rise up with a new or perhaps old system where people and environment, where this relationships between people and environment and our interconnection is completely at the center. Where rights and care and solidarity are valued and prioritized over profit making and competition. And where we really put forward a whole new frame of thinking about the way that we live in, in relation, in harmony with each other and with the land.

[00:33:16] Patricia: Well, I think you've just made the transition to another topic here that we can talk about. I know you have a newly published work, * ["Ecofeminist Participatory Action Research for Planetary Health" in the Handbook for Social Sciences and Global Public Health](#), edited by Pranee Liamputtong. (* Corrected after the original recording).

And in your article, and as you just did, you make that connection about planetary health that combines human rights and the rights of nature, that planetary health and human health are inextricably bound together.

[00:33:58] Patricia: And you make that [00:34:00] case that while FPAR has say, historically been human-centered, it may potentially marginalize the rights and the agencies and the voices of nature.

So Trimita, let's dig into this and, and how does your paradigm, your theory, your approach of EcoFPAR, how does it address then the potential shortcomings of FPAR, which might marginalize the rights and the agency and the voices of nature?

[00:34:29] Trimita: So our experience with APWLD's Climate Justice Feminist Participatory Action Research program, showed that FPAR can be successfully used in a variety of contexts to promote ecosocial and climate justice while linking human health and environmental wellbeing.

For example, women in a province in Pakistan, they recorded the impact of extreme weather events and campaigned for restoration of forests in their area. They advocated for the implementation of laws and policies to address environmental protection, deforestation, and pollution by industries and oil, gas and gas fields. In Bắc Kạn province of Vietnam, women also addressed soil degradation by advocating for the traditional practice of using organic banana compost instead of pesticides. In Nepal, women planted over 1000 plant varieties to protect their river embankments against flooding.

So through this work, we started to see the interconnectivity between human health and the health of the planet. So we weren't calling it EcoFPAR at the time, it's the climate justice FPAR. But we realized that FPAR could be expanded to address this relationship more explicitly, especially in the current context of the climate crisis.

So this led us to the concept of ecofeminist, you know, developing the concept of Eco Feminist Participatory Action Research in short EcoFPAR, which I, we think, you know in the current [00:36:00] context, we cannot do FPAR without addressing the limits of the planetary boundaries. I think Naomi is working more on this and I'm very glad to be working with her on this concept. It's still at the theoretical stage but maybe she can add more to the concept.

[00:36:18] Naomi: So, Trimuta, Kavita and I, along with many other women, have been engaging in FPAR in the Asia Pacific for a long, long time. And, you know, I, I feel like collective structural analysis is highly political and is, is very informed by an understanding of, like I was saying before, you know, those, those big oppressive systems of power.

Trimuta and I, and, and a colleague, Aaron Jenkins recently started to do some thinking and writing and exploring about how we could potentially de-center the human in FPAR theory and practice. It is very human-centric, currently FPAR. It's focused very strongly around human rights and social justice. And even when we're thinking about an issue like climate change or environmental degradation, we come at it from a human rights lens, or we come at it from a social justice lens.

[00:37:13] Naomi: Now, living on unceded lands of Indigenous Peoples as I do in Western Australia, and learning, as I'm very privileged to, from Indigenous Elders and leaders, I've been really challenged over the last five or 10 years to think about, again, this relationship that I have and that we all have with nature or, you know, as I prefer to say with Country, with Boodja in, in the place that I live.

And there's a great movement internationally around multi-species justice and thinking about the rights of the more than human, you know, Buen Vivir and all the beautiful work that's coming out of Latin America when thinking about a transformed economic and social

system that centers the environment and people in a [00:38:00] reciprocal, relational rights-based context.

And then of course, the long work that Indigenous People have done over thousands and thousands and thousands of years all around the world in caring for and promoting Country. And all the work that they have been doing through with their ancestors in community to maintain flourishing environments.

Nestled in that context, it became really kind of clear to me that I think FPAR needed to go a step further. It was thinking around how could place or Country or nature or more than humans or whoever we want to kind of think about nature or the environment. How can place be an active agent and co-researcher in the way that we do FPAR? Rather than humans speaking for Country, how can Country itself participate in the research process? What does it mean to center First Nations Peoples and Country in the co-design and co-production of research and activism for ecosocial justice? These are the questions that Trimita, Aaron and I spend a lot of time grappling with and really thinking about, particularly in the frame of planetary health, which understands that the health of humans is completely interrelated with the health of the planet.

[00:39:29] Naomi: And so EcoFPAR is very much an emerging methodology for us. We, we're just beginning the process of thinking about this and it's, you know, I think it comes from a place of humility, a place of genuine curiosity and wonder about, you know, how could we be taking FPAR a step further when thinking about activism, for example. How is the forest, how is the numbat, how is the rain participating in the process of activism for climate [00:40:00] justice?

What does it mean to undertake research with the river, to sit by a river and to engage in dialogue and yarning about environmental injustice or, or kind of any issue that we might be experiencing or feeling. What does it mean to really center place in the process of doing an FPAR project and how can we be, and when we think about not only systems of oppression that we want to dismantle, but what are the systems of vitality? What are the beautiful, interconnected, rich, vital systems that exist in our nested ecosystems that can actually help and teach humans to live in a far more interconnected way?

This is exciting work for us and, and in no way resolved. And, you know, and I, and I don't think that we're innovators necessarily. [00:40:52] Indigenous scholars and activists have been talking about, and writing about and advocating for this for a very, very long time. What we are trying to do is to bring this into the Feminist Participatory Action Research scholarship and to really, I guess, challenge our own way of engaging in research and activism by coming from this place-based or environmentally informed approach.

[00:41:16] Naomi: There is a project that I'm involved in, in the southwest of Western Australia that I think speaks a little bit to what we're trying to conceptualize here. The community of Collie is based in Wilman Boodja, the lands of the Wilman Noongar people in the southwest. Collie is a coal mining community that hosts Western Australia's largest coal fired power plant and has done so for a hundred years, firing most of the state of Western Australia. In recent years, the government of Western Australia has decided to transition from fossil fuel energy production in Collie to renewable energy, which you know, will impact thousands of workers and the [00:42:00] economic basis of this community.

I was contacted by the Climate Justice Union, which is an activist group here in Western Australia. They were interested in doing a social justice analysis of the transition process in Collie and working with community members to understand how the transition affects people who are most marginalized and disadvantaged in the community, and support them to advocate for a just transition that is, that leaves no one behind.

And so we've been working with community members in Collie in particular, Wilman Elders and community members folks with a disability, low income community members, queer young people, a whole range of different workers, and a really beautiful, broad diversity of the community, to do this participatory social justice analysis of the just transition process. And at the center of this is Country. It is the Collie River, the bilya, which the community, whether Indigenous or not, are very strongly connected to. It's this incredible environment and forests that are situated in Collie that people want to protect and they want to enhance through whatever the transition process might be.

[00:43:12] Naomi: And it's thinking about community and care and the, the potential of a care economy that really leaves no one behind that could be the centerpiece of a transition process. So EcoFPAR has, has, has kind started to sneak in already in the way that we're thinking about this approach in Collie. Because it's not just about the rights of people or the social justice issues that we're facing through the transition. It's actually thinking about how can the transition from fossil fuels to a renewable future enhance and support the flourishing of Country and her peoples, and what does that mean in both methodology and the process of, of the research, but also in the activism and the advocacy for the policy change that we need? [00:44:00] So, yeah, it's a really it's a beautiful and exciting and, and humble place to be as we explore this methodologically. And also to think about what it means to decenter ourselves as researchers and people in the long story of what is FPAR.

[00:44:19] Patricia: As you're drawing on and building on learning from Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous researchers, Indigenous cosmologies, what are some of the ways that you could, the methodologies, the, the how to, how, how would you see, I guess, involving Country, involving nature? What are some ways that would look like in a project?

[00:44:47] Naomi: There's a lot of really beautiful work emerging from Indigenous scholars and activists in Australia about this. One key approach is that research that's occurring on Country is now being authored in publications where Country is the first author. So in the Martuwurra River Catchment, which is a, a West Australia's largest sacred site up in the North in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, the activists, the Indigenous activists who are advocating for a just development approach to their traditional lands are engaging a lot of Indigenous-informed research approaches.

[00:45:27] Naomi: And every journal article that they write has Country is the first author. Now, of course, you know, they gain permission from Elders and they do this, and they, or they are Elders themselves and they do this in, in complete respect and relationship. But I think that this is in itself a quite significant thing where instead of kind of going along with the academic protocol of the most the, the researcher that has the most kind of leadership or engagement with the project being named as the first author, instead collectively [00:46:00] active or researchers are relinquishing that position to Country and acknowledging that Country is always first. So that's a really great and practical process that we're seeing happen across Australia, and it's, I think some really exciting, again, processes for, for decentering humans.

[00:46:17] Naomi: Another method that I'm really excited to engage with, with community is research on Country and research with Country. Recently in the Collie work, the Elders of the community and some of the researchers and other community members were privileged to have a meeting with some policymakers from the Prime Minister's office. They came over to Collie to meet with us to talk about just transition from the community's frame, particularly from a First Nations frame.

We were very deliberate about having this meeting on the banks of the bilya of the Collie River, a meeting on Country. We were sitting outside where the policymakers came to Country, where we followed Indigenous protocols where Elders spoke first. Elders led the yarn. Yarn is a conversation or a discussion. And you know, every now and then the Elders would interrupt the yarn to tell people that, you know, the different animals were participating in the yarn or to point out parts of Country or to stop and take moments of silence to engage with the bilya. Very much led by an Indigenous protocol and process around this discussion with policymakers.

[00:47:36] Naomi: It makes me really think about the way that research is undertaken, particularly about issues like climate justice, of the importance of doing this research in place, of being with Country when we're exploring these issues, when we are developing advocacy strategies, when we are sharing about our lived experiences of injustice or our,

our, our pains, our, our sorrow, our hopes, our [00:48:00] grief, all of these feelings. We can't separate those from the reality of Country and, and Country's experience.

And so, yeah, I think a great method of, of being with Country, being with bilya, with river, being with trees or, you know, other, other kind of natural forces methodologically shifts us into a completely different frame and relationship. I'm not, I don't have, I don't have all the answers for this either. I think, and, you know, again, I, I really refer to a lot of Indigenous authors like Tuck and McKenzie who've propose a whole range of Indigenous methods for place inquiry. There's a heap of work that they've done, whether it's story work, mapping place worlds, remapping, eating the landscape, you know, there's lots of different approaches that have been put forward and, and, you know, I, I draw to them and refer to them.

I think the point here is to, again, see how much we can be exiting the sterility of the halls of an academic workshop room or a classroom or a conference center, or even a community center where we so often put ourselves as people and being with an on Country in the process of deliberation where Country is an active voice and speaker in the process.

[00:49:21] Patricia: At one point in my life, I was training teachers and in the southwest United States, and in addition to using a lot of the work of Dine or Navajo educators, we drew heavily from David Orr's work and the notion of biophilia and that young people, they won't stand up for nature if they're never in it. And how challenging that is in contemporary times for young people to be out in Country, at least in urban and industrialized places.

Let's make a shift here from talking about the doing of FPAR and the reconceptualizing then of FPAR as EcoFPAR, what this means for training Participatory Action Researchers and, and what it means for the training of Feminist Participatory Action Researchers.

Since I've been doing this podcast, I hear a lot from graduate students and young researchers who are in universities or organizations that don't understand much of anything about action research, any version, whether it's feminist or otherwise. And that they're in, in fact, in some places where faculty can be downright hostile to Participatory or Action Research or Feminist Action Research. And Naomi, contrary to that scenario, you're at a place, the Edith Cowan University, the Climate Justice Research Program where FPAR is a core methodology. So how did that happen?

[00:51:04] Naomi: I define myself as a pracademic, a practitioner academic, or the language I prefer to use, an activist researcher. And I've always worked in collaboration with community groups, activists, social movements, communities and Country. Through my, I guess, academic and practice story, I've had a lot of mentors, feminist women, who have done a lot of the hard work within university institutions to make space for participatory

methodologies. So I guess I come into a university context with a long story from myself and women who've come before me and women in communities that I work with, of resisting and challenging internal structures of, of oppressive power within institutions like a university.

[00:51:53] Edith Cowan University is a relatively young university, I think it's only maybe 30 years old. And what comes with a young university, I think is an openness to opportunity, to being fairly innovative, and to not being stuck in quite traditional scholarly approaches. The imperative for universities in the neoliberal age pretty much is bring in as much research money as you can and publish as much as you can because they're the metrics that the university measuring itself by. So, what sort of has emerged for me, and I've found a way to create a research program that meets those metrics for the university but really is at the service of community.

[00:52:33] Every single project that I do comes to me from community. I'm contacted by community and they say, you know, we're concerned about this issue. We'd like to work with you and your team to be able to undertake an FPAR process to try and address whatever the social issue might be. I don't create or design my own research. It comes to me from community and we co-design it together and implement it.

I've been fortunate enough to be, to have found a collective within the university and form a research center, the Center for People, Place, and Planet with other researchers in the transdisciplinary approach who are interested in and working in the space of human-environment relations and coming from a whole range of different methodological and philosophical positions and traditions.

[00:53:19] I think that we've been able to do this work because of the collective. By working collectively and bringing about change, both in community and delivering on the metrics has really supported our work to be, to be supported and to be, and to flourish and further seeing ourselves as activists and not academics makes an enormous difference.

The university is a context for my work. I'm not an academic because I want to be an academic. I'm in this context because it allows me the space to do this. And I think having a kind of a fairly detached relationship to the identity of a scholar or the identity of an academic enormously helps here thinking about, what's the best place for me to be right now to be supporting, and growing, and and strengthening our activist movements for eco social justice and continually reflecting on whether this institution that I'm embedded in, for example, enables that. The day it doesn't is the day I won't work here.

[00:54:21] Patricia: Trimita, you started the Feminist Participatory Action Research Academy, an online academy. And tell us about that as a way for training Feminist Participatory Action Researchers.

[00:54:39] Trimita: So where Naomi is affiliated with an academic institution, for me, my entry to FPAR was not through research. So personally, I don't see FPAR as a research methodology. For me, it was a powerful tool for disrupting power imbalances and driving social transformation. So it started from the ground, but of course the research is one of the elements, right? But action and empowerment and participation, those elements are equally important.

So at this point of time, I think we are looking for an answer, how to safeguard our planet from this destructive human activities. And I think FPAR's foundation in feminist principles is really important because it helps us confront gendered and intersectional injustices to understand the complexity of injustices within our human relationships. And some of these areas are neglected in traditional research methods. That's why sometimes the work produced in the academic institutions are not so relevant on the ground. And there is also empathy from the feminist activist on the ground about the academic institutions, which are often seen as, you know, very high level, unreachable and often colonial and influenced by neoliberal ideologies.

[00:56:02] So I think FPAR helps us demystify research. It's, it's not that difficult. Anybody can take research. Everybody is always generating data and analyzing data. It doesn't have to be so technical and in the form of, you know, writing in English. So that's the idea behind, I think, how to do FPAR training. But also we cannot totally neglect the mainstream as I shared before, because, you know, grassroots women are often neglected by the authorities. They're not listened to. So when we partner with academic, you know, scholars it's often useful to co-produce knowledge together, which can then be quite useful for informing and influencing policymakers because then they listen to that more.

[00:56:47] Trimita: For me, the beauty of FPAR and EcoFPAR is trying to go one step further to challenge the idea that humans are the center of the universe and emphasize that the, you know, the importance of centering planetary health because without that, we are all going to die, right? Humans are just a part of it, like the trees and the rivers and the rocks and the animals. And it's important to acknowledge that because we are so disconnected from that idea. And I think beauty of FPAR lies in the ability to discover local solutions to global issues, create culturally resonant policies that truly align with the lived experiences of those most affected both humans and nature. So in a sense, FPAR doesn't just study the world, it actively thrives to transform it for the better.

Now coming to the FPAR Academy, you know, it was actually one of those unexpected good things that came out of the pandemic. So over the past decade, decade, I've had the privilege of directly working with countless incredible activists. We were using FPAR to address a range of issues from climate justice to women's political participation and more. But as the pandemic hit we had to shift our trainings online. And there was a point when all of us were repeating the same training content for different groups. And people often began asking for video recordings of these sessions. So, and then it hit me, why not create a platform and online platform where this content is readily available?

[00:58:16] Patricia: The three of you collaborate together. You have other people and organizations you work with. You have the Asia Pacific WLD that's brought you together. You have the Centre for People Place, and Planet that Naomi you've created. What do you say to our listeners who don't yet have or aren't a part of these larger connected organizations. What can you say of encouragement to emerging, beginning feminist, participatory action researchers who don't have that yet?

[00:58:52] Trimita: You know, when I began my first FPAR I knew nothing about FPAR. I just wanted to do something for my community. That place-based local approach is really important. So I think it doesn't take a lot to study FPAR project. It's a tool for activism that that's comprehensive. And I know that many, you know, emerging feminists, young people, they want to do more, but they don't know where to start. I think FPAR is a great tool to just get started. It will just happen I think naturally.

[00:59:23] Naomi: Activism must be done collectively. And so by virtue, I would argue that FPAR and um, research should be done collectively. If the imperative or the intent of FPAR is to bring about social change, to challenge systems of injustice and oppression to bring about a fairer, safer, more caring world for people and planet. So I guess my advice at the outset would be for folks to find your people, find your collective, and find your place, to focus on relationship and relationships in the plural.

To build that trust and community together to identify the sorts of change that you want to bring about and the issues that you are struggling with. And then really understanding that FPAR is a methodology or a tool to help you to do that collective activist work. FPAR is deeply political. It is unapologetically aiming towards dismantling structures of power and oppression. And when methodologies like this become mainstreamed, what we start to see is then becoming depoliticized, and instead it turns into a kind of, you know, lovely process of participatory research where people are contributing and then producing some knowledges and outcomes that then maybe might inform a fairly, you know standard or mainstream policy framework.

[01:00:52] Naomi: FPAR is so much more than that. It's not about trying to reform bad policy. It's about trying to create a whole new world completely with a whole new idea of what policy might be and what, what the role of government is and, and what it means to dismantle structures of power. My advice really would be to remain connected in and part of social movements and see your role as, as an academic or a scholar or researcher, as something that can support that activism. If we're not careful, I think we'll see ourselves becoming white-washed, becoming mainstreamed, sanitized, losing that radical imperative. And so I just really urge people to, to remain true to the ethics and values and principles that underpin FPAR, which really is a critical feminist intersectional lens.

[01:01:44] Patricia: Kavita, is there anything you'd like to add to that?

[01:01:47] Kavita: Yeah, absolutely. FPAR is such an accessible tool. It requires, is really following the principles and values of what FPAR is really about, which is political activism, and I completely agree with Naomi. It is grounded in radical political activism and for us to really influence a systems transformation away from systems of patriarchy and capitalism and colonialism. This is a decolonial tool that should and can be embraced across the world. And it produces the sort of evidence, and more importantly, the stories that need to be heard in spaces where right now it's not.

I also find that the women that we work with, women who do not come from academic or legal or economic backgrounds, these are grassroots women and there is so much joy in doing this work together for them and for us. And we find a lot of joy just by being in solidarity and allyship with others and knowing that we are in this fight together.

[01:03:14] Patricia: Well, I think on that note, let's wrap it up here. I, I love that you've left us, the three of you, with this sense of hopefulness and the power of solidarity work. And it's, it's such a hopeful note that you've left us on. Naomi and Trimita and Kavita, I want to thank you so much for sharing with us today your trailblazing Eco FPAR work. I can't wait for our listeners to be able to chew on this for a while and think about the things that you've left us with. So thank you so much for being with us.

Patricia: I want to thank our listeners. You can help expand our audience by sharing this episode link with your colleagues, your friends, your networks. A transcript of today's podcast and additional information about our guest will be posted on our companion website, which is parfemtrailblazers.net. And that's it folks, for Episode One of Season Two of Participatory Action Research: Feminist Trailblazers and Good Troublemakers. And as civil rights icon John Lewis urges us, go make some good trouble of your own.