Aída Hernández Castillo

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CTM: We are talking to Aida Hernandez Castillo, who is an old friend of many years and comrade and sister and today is the 1st of June 2016. So, welcome to this project and to our conversation. Maybe we should begin by asking you to talk a little bit about what brought you to feminism and to feminist work, however you define it.

AHC: I am part of a generation of Mexican feminists like many of my friends that arrived at feminism through the left. Because we started to be activists mainly in the anti-systemic struggle in the '80s when Central America was very important in our struggle. So, when I was seventeen years old I arrived in Mexico City to study social anthropology and I got involved in the movement of solidarity with Guatemala and I was working for the Guatemalan press agency that was called *Info Prensa* when I was eighteen. So, I always joke that I'm in debt more with *Info Prensa* than with Stanford because I learned to write in this press agency. And many of those Guatemalan journalists were people that had been involved in the struggle in Guatemala. So my first years of political activism were very linked to the struggle in Central America, more specifically in Guatemala, and many of those Leftist intellectuals that were linked with political military movement. So I started to get involved politically, but very close to a sector of the left that believed in political military action. And as you can imagine, the kind of involvement was very masculine. The kind of Che Guevara ethics, no? And from that perspective, we were very young, we had our political responsibilities that were like our political teachers, were very concerned with feminism as an ideology that divides people. And so since a very young age I saw feminists…as a matter of fact in those times those women in academia that declared themselves feminist were upper middle class women that were very centered in their struggle in the pro-choice agenda. So, I didn't identify myself with these kinds of women and at the same time the kind of struggle that for me was a priority in this time was the genocide of indigenous people in Guatemala. So, the pro-choice was the last of my options. So, in that case for many years I was not a feminist and I could

even say that I was anti-feminist, because what I built as feminist was something that was not appealing to me at all. So it wasn't until later when I finished my undergraduate studies that I moved to Chiapas and I started to work in the refugee camps there…and it was a project linked to the Liberation Theology Church and I got very involved with then indigenous women that were Guatemalan refugees in refugee camps. And we were working with popular education methodology—how to create a critical consciousness but also how to build a community in exile. And I became very good friends with another woman who studied education at NAM, at the National University, and very centered on popular education and she was my roommate and she was kidnapped by Federal Police and raped. It was this experience that marked my life because when Lupita was raped she was gang raped because there were a group of them and she was kidnapped the entire night. When she came back she decided that she wanted to denounce the way and we went to the legal authorities and the ministerio publico, the public attorney, and the way she was treated by the justice was awful. And—

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CTM: When was that? What period?

AHC: We are talking about 1988. It was in '88 specifically. So we put an advertisement in the radio because somebody told us that she was not the only case. Seems like the people that were getting involved in grassroots movements were being…it was not a coincidence that she was raped because the man that raped her had weapons and had a radio and all those were the characteristics of the federal police that doesn't use uniforms in Mexico. So we thought that it was a way of rape and we wanted to know if there were other people that had that experience so we put in a spot in the radio saying that if you had had any problems with sexual violence and you didn't find justice in the justice system we're going to get together in this coffee house. It was the local radio. Seventy women arrived. Not all of them with the same characteristics. Some of them were raped by relatives, other ones were indigenous women that had been expelled by their political bosses. It's a big issue in the highlands of Chiapas. Political bosses expel the families that— Caciques, they're called, indigenous political bosses—and they rape their daughters. So there were indigenous, non-indigenous. We had to move to a house. And this was the beginning of the first feminist organization in which I participated. And I realized that it was very difficult to continue working for social justice without considering what we now call intersections. These different levels of violence that we were experiencing. But it took a long time for me to declare myself a feminist because I was working—we created an organization that was called Grupo de Mujeres de San Cristóbal de Las Casas. We created a shelter that we self-sustained with the money and it was indigenous and non-indigenous women working together, some of them from Mexico

City, some from Chiapas. For me, many of the theories that we're now discussing came to my heart and to my mind through the practice because I saw that the political activism centered in class and anti-state struggle was not considering gender and was leaving something out. The same thing happened when I started to work in this women's organization. Because a lot of methodologies that we were using against violence were methodologies we took from Mexico City's experience. For example, this idea that a woman who is suffering violence has to work with her self-esteem. How do you work with the idea of self-esteem when you don't even know how the person that you're working with imagines personhood, how she can imagine herself in the world? Or when your main strategy is a legalist strategy with the state and many of those women were dealing with customary law so you have a team of feminist lawyers that know nothing about customary law. So I start to challenge in what way the feminist strategies we were using were not responding to their specific needs of a very diverse cultural area. In that search I found Chandra's work, between other things, thinking about how there is another form of colonialism to come here and say we all have to do this, we work a lot—the psychologists in the group work a lot—we were all volunteers at that time. So that's the other thing that I want to say. For example, the lawyer; she was a very ethnocentric lawyer and she probably even had some kind of racist attitude towards many of the women that came to the Center in a way that the cultures they were from were behind cultures. But at the same time she had been working for free for fifteen years. So it's not that easy just to dis—

CTM: Yeah, to completely dismiss that because these are also people who are working and have given labor without recognition for a long time.

AHC: For a long time, so I have to be careful with the way I approach those issues with them because it can be very easily—

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—just as an anecdote, a US scholar came to Chiapas and did her dissertation working with some of those women. The way she represented this lawyer was a caricature. It was, from my perspective, very offensive. I know she's just a simple woman in the sense she doesn't make a lot of theory, is very good with panel law. That's what she does. And of course, she took the weakest part of the chain and destroyed it. So it's also different levels of—

CTM: But what you're talking about Aida, is more so while we want to acknowledge the integrity of individuals who are doing this work with the best of intentions there is a disconnect between what they are doing and what they see as good work, and what the larger collective or community actually needs the work to be like, and especially if you reproduce colonial paradigms. This is why knowledge is so dangerous

sometimes, right?

LEC: Some knowledge for sure, because there's a class dissonance that's going on there that she doesn't even see.

AHC: And an ethnic one.

CTM: An ethnocentric one.

AHC: Yes, I know. And how can we, with activists, as a scholar who is also an activist because it is very easily in those dialogues which you said, like do you know that the kind of litigation you are doing is very racist? Do you know the way you are treating people…it is very easily…as a scholar also…very easily they can say, come on, don't bring your theory here! Here we're in the practice, we're in daily life, we have to do things now…and I don't have time to…And the issues that I always discussed, because I felt myself in the cross of many different strategies, because as an anthropologist—and I do something that's called legal anthropology in Mexico—I argue a lot with the idealization of customary law that some anthropologists do so I'm always talking about let's see the gender perspective on this. But with the lawyer in the group I was just like you have to at least see what is customary law! You cannot center all your strategies in state law. So we have to see…and she said, "You're a cultural relativist and my colleague said you're just a western feminist that…"

LEC: Wow.

AHC: So how can we build bridges? I always say to my friends that good theory helps good practice, that the issue to have a more complex perspective of how those intersections work helps us to look for various strategies. Because if what we want is a better life for the women with whom we work, we don't want to gain cases in front of the law. I mean, you can gain a case and then she goes back to her community—

CTM: And the same stuff happens.

AHC: Or she's isolated because she didn't consider the elders, she just want to the state law.

LEC & **CTM:** Right.

AHC: So we have to see what kind of strategies can we build. And for that, I think—probably, I'm being arrogant—but I think from academia, we have something to offer to these kinds of projects. So just to…how did I work with this dilemma…what I proposed to them …and it worked very interestingly with a lot of challenges, but it did work very interestingly…it was to have a workshop in which indigenous women

who worked as accompanying cases of domestic violence that in many cases are, for example, rural teachers, nurses, midwives, because women that are victims of domestic violence usually go to those women that have some kind of power in the community—could teach our legal team how customary law is treating those cases. And that the legal team will teach this group of women how to make a suit if you want to go to the law. So to have a dialogue of knowledge of strategies towards law. And for me it was very interesting because I didn't know anything about the law and I didn't know…so for me it was a learning experience on both sides.

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CTM: On both sides.

AHC: So we worked two years with this exchange.

CTM: And this was still in Chiapas?

AHC: Still in Chiapas. Well, at the end they decided to do a network of anti-violence promoters in the community themselves. Because one of the things that resolved it, among other things, was that many of them were from different indigenous groups and different communities that work in isolation and make them very vulnerable. Because in many cases, getting involved in a case of domestic violence of somebody else is just gossipy. It's none of your business. So, how did they start to work that way? And with the lawyers it was more difficult. Because the law, I always say, they are like a very closed ethnic group. They have their language and it's very difficult for them to decenter the rule of law as the center of their strategy. But I'm still working with lawyers a lot and I have another bet [sic] now is to try to bring those topics to the law school. And more recently, I moved out of Chiapas and more recently I have been working…many of the feminists in Latin America and in Mexico specifically are always arguing about how customary law can be against women's rights, and spending a lot of time struggling against customary law, and at the same time you have the state law, the penal law, putting a lot of women in prison and there is very little energy with the problem of imprisonment. So after many years of working with those kind of issues that were related to customary law I began to work eight years ago with the issue of penal law and what I call racismo judicial—judicial racism—how racism has marked the access to justice for a racialized woman in Mexico. It's a project on which I've been working for the last eight years and it's very different from my previous experience. It's a collective project—should I talk about it?

CTM: Yeah.

LEC: Mm-hmm. Yeah, go ahead.

CTM: Yeah, we don't need to ask you questions. You're…yes…

AHC: What happened is that we were struggling with the issue of customary law because in 2001 there was a law reform in Mexico that recognized the rights of indigenous people to their own justice system. And many feminists started to scream publicly that that was going backwards in women's rights. That it would open the possibility for women's rights to be violated by indigenous justice systems. And you know, this debate, they barely included the voices of indigenous women.

LEC: Wow.

AHC: And they rarely included the experiences, that are multiple, of indigenous women that are transforming their justice system, that are participating in the transformation of their justice system. So it became like the veil and the Muslim. There is a very derogatory term, "Usos y Costumbres"…they don't call it Indigenous Justice System but Uses and Customs. Recognition of Uses and Customs. So we started this project to try to see what women were doing with their own justice system. But when we were working on this project—I worked with a beautiful team of female legal anthropologists that had been working together for a long time—there was a huge issue going on with the repression of the peasants' movement that wanted to stop an airport and the police—the Atenco Movement—the police repressed the movement and seventeen women were raped during the…and put into jail. And this event became a scandal because two of them were foreigners and gave their testimony of the rapes. It took to me to jail for the first time. I went to visit them in jail. And one of them was an indigenous woman who was a street vendors' organizer who was at this meeting…in this manifestation. And Magdalena Garcia Duran, she became a political prisoner by Amnesty International. But when I was there I realized there were many indigenous women that were not political prisoners in the most strict sense but that were prisoners of a state policy against drugs that is criminalizing small vendors—narco menudeo we say in Spanish—people that sell small with very high penalties. 10-15 years.

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CTM: Mm-hmm. That's familiar, no?

LEC: Hmm.

AHC: Because what the Mexican government was doing is they have to prove that they are doing something against drugs so you give statistics. You have so many

people but you don't see who they are. And that's how I started this new stage of my activism and my scholarly work because I wanted to see who those women were and what was their process in justice. To be able to enter into the jail was very difficult. I found a feminist poet who was teaching creative writing in one of the jails so I entered through her. I wanted to write the life stories of those women in prison and one of the writers, an inmate from Korean background—her name is Suzuki Lee Camacho [18**:**49]—told me, "They don't allow you to enter and they don't allow us to go out. We are writers. Why don't you teach us how to write life stories? And we can interview the other inmates and write their stories." This was the beginning of a project that really had an impact on my life. For eight years I have been working with them. From the first book that was written by hand, given to me. I helped them correct that. I got funding for the publication that is called *Under the Shadow of the Guamúchil*. They decided that they wanted to learn to make books, not just to write. So, a feminist editor started to work with me. Marina Ruiz. And she's part of this movement that does art-craft books with recycling materials. So, she taught a workshop on that and to make a long story short, now it's called Colectivo Editorial de Mujeres en Prisión, Editorial Collective of Women in Prisons, Women in the Shadows. They have published twelve books already. They write the books, they capture the books. We bought two computers. They do the entire editorial process.

LEC: Wow.

AHC: And with inmates that are out now, they continue to be part of the collective. We have a radio program. So now, part of the struggle is…I have some kind of doubts about this but the issue of how to impact public policy towards prisons…they are working on that. I have many doubts because the state is so corrupt. I find it very difficult to imagine that part of my struggle will be for public policy. It's not something that I am very…

LEC: Hopeful.

AHC: Yeah, hopeful. I prefer more grassroots movements than…but there is a sector of the collective that wants to do that.

CTM: Mm-hmm.

LEC: Because they probably recognize at the level of policy if you can make some kind of positive, progressive change you can impact so much more, no? And sometimes I think we tend to think at the level of grassroots more, that we do, we understand how intense that is and how impactful it can be, in small time. But working with the state that is such an organized, intransigent bureaucracy, it's easy to get hopeless because they will not change very easily. But—

AHC: And the other thing is that in Mexico, the state…we were discussing that very recently with a friend of mine from Chile, that there are states and states. How do you do public policy with Honduras state? The state is so linked, for example, to organized crime. And that's the case in Mexico right now. The people that you deal with as bureaucrats can also be part of a cartel, so it's very difficult.

CTM: Yeah, it's a completely different—

AHC: Or something else that very easily happens is that they pass laws that are very repressive and then they use laws that have to do more with cultural politics that are very progressive and they even pass it at the same—This just happened two weeks ago, in which the President of Mexico on the Day Against Homophobia promoted a law to recognize sexual diversity and the possibility of gay people to get married.

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And it was a big issue in all the newspapers. And the Presidential Palace was with rainbow colors. And all these radical activists of the LGBT movement were taking pictures of themselves with the president with the palace behind them and that same week he sent a law to Congress in which he gives the military the right to enter into a lot of the civilians' issues and they have been declaring the level of human rights violations that the new law can open with the military. So you know, it's this game that you think that you're getting something but you don't know if you're really getting something or you're being used.

CTM: So, it's more the law that was passed was really about a law that gives impunity to the state and the military to walk in and criminalize a whole bunch of things which may not have been seen as criminal behavior before.

AHC: Well, the other thing is that we gained the right of—when the army commits an illegal acts or violates human rights with a civilian they have to be judged by civilian law and with the new law they are going back to their own courts. So, we're losing ground again. And for example, if the army thinks that a person, a civilian is involved in some criminal act that has to do with the army they can interview the civilians, they can take them to their—now they're taking us to their places! And that happened at the same time as all these discourses on sexual diversity. In the same week. Exactly the same week.

CTM: Yeah.

AHC: So, just as an example, what I say is that sometimes it's very difficult…it's not that I am completely anti—because in Latin American as well as in the US, there is a

big split between the institution of feminism and radical feminism. And they have been struggling for a long time. But what I say is that in my case, it's not a principle that I was never work with institutions but the issue is what kind of institutions do we have when we have a state that works like the Mexican state in this specific moment?

CTM: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

LEC: This is so interesting, you know, because one of the questions that we have is about what kinds of challenges you have encountered in the work and you have laid out enormous challenges. What have been some of the strategies you have, not just personally but collectively with the groups that you work with, tried to overcome some of these challenges? Like this example of the law, have there been discussion of—

CTM: These two things happening at the same time?

LEC: And what do they—

AHC: Well, that happened last week. Two weeks ago, the 17th of May. Well, there are many things. I am part of a network that is called La Red de Feminismos Descoloniales and we are several activist-scholars and we're trying to work more with media. I write now in a newspaper called *La Jornada*. It's a national newspaper. I have a column. So, I wrote an article immediately about it. But we're also trying to use more multimedia. There is a feminist TV channel in the net, *Luchadoras***,** now that you say warriors—! It doesn't have subtitles but the program is called *Luchadoras*. Fighters. It's on the Internet so we're trying to diversity the textual strategies that we use to go beyond the book. That's one area in which we are working. And the other thing is political alliances. That's a big challenge all over and there is a lot of tension right now in Mexico about that because—I'm not going to go into a lot of detail but Mexico has—right now more people have died with the war against drugs in Mexico than in Iraq during all those years. So, violence and disappearance are the main problems in Mexico.

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And many of the parents of the disappeared are men and women and we have to work with them and they are not feminists. For example, the forty-three students from Ayotzinapa that disappeared, they came from a very leftist teachers' cult that has a discourse and a practice and even a performance that's very Che Guevara style. And many feminists do not want to work with them. I think there's a moment in which we have to articulate our differences that we have to confront the issue of state violence and narco-state because it is a narco-state. And as feminists, for example, one issue

that we have to deal with—and I have been writing and talking to feminist organizations about it—is that people that are linked to drug issues, like many of the inmates are women that are very vulnerable because nobody wants to defend somebody that can be linked to a cartel, because when the come then cartels it's awful. So if you're a feminist you're not going to use your energy to work with these women. You will prefer to work with political prisoners or with the issue of criminalization of abortion. But issues of drugs, nobody wants to get involved. Not the human rights, organizations, not the feminist organizations. And the majority of women that are being killed or that are in prison are women that didn't have choices. The cartels are going to communities and taking women and they have to go. And many of them, when they capture a group, they sacrifice the woman and they leave. They even negotiate with women. If the police gets a group—and in those books that they have written you can see that—the police comes, there is a group, there are three women. They give money and three women to the police. And they leave. So those men that got them to get involved are free. And they're in prison. And it's very difficult to have a sensitivity towards this kind of a situation for many reasons. I mean, one of them is all the images of what the cartels have done are very bloody and you don't want to get involved with them, at all. And if those women were linked in any way to the cartels, you don't want to get close to them. But now that I know them by name, I know their life stories, I know how they were captured and how vulnerable they are—and it's not just those that are in prison. The feminicide side in Mexico is very high and many of the women were women that were first captured, that were taken away and then they were killed. So I think it's a moment in which human rights organizations and feminist organizations, we have to build. For me, we are living right now in a situation of emergency and we need to pass—in any context, we need to build alliances, but there are contexts in which you can say, "Ah, no this Che Guevara-style man, I don't want to work with him. I'm sick of him. I have done it before. I don't want to deal with him." But in a situation of emergency we need to deal with our differences and build something. After the Ayotzinapa case, we have been working a lot trying to get together with difference kinds of groups—what are we going to do together, how can we build this? So that my work now.

LEC: The women in prison though—what kind of work is being done with them? Feminist work, the women in prison. For example, they pay for the crime with three women and some money. Those women, something happens in their minds, I'm sure, after they are incarcerated and they've been there for a long time and they are thinking about how they were discarded and they became like objects. So, you know, like how we say in the old days—on the left you say, well, you know, the whole thing about people going to work in the same environment conscientizes the workers. Some kind of conscientization happens to those women, probably, on some level. So, is there any feeling, any hope of working with those incarcerated women?

AHC: Well, this is a very small project. But in the case of the colectiva that is this

work that we have been doing for eight years, it's very interesting because the writing at the beginning of the first book they published, it was a genealogy of violence.

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It was how they suffered, how they were raped as a child, they were raped as teenagers, they were abused by their husbands, they were raped by the police, they were tortured in jail. It was just like, violence, violence, violence. But then after they took all this violence out they started to write a lot about empowerment, about building community, about what it means to be together. And using poetry but also playing with words in different ways. They have three books, one of poetry, one of narratives that talks a lot this experience, what it means when you discover that you are not alone, build a community and—I think they all were of consciousness raising or consciousness awareness. I think that's happening. Not everywhere, not in all the places, but many of them are building—and now one project that they're working with another one of the members of the collective that is not an inmate is an animation short cut about romantic love and the dangers of romantic love. And it's very funny and they're working with a draft. So, the ones that are outside right now are working in other prisons, taking the methodology of building community in prison. So there is a very strong critique to the reasons…oh, there is the structural part, of course, we discuss a lot what is the relation between rape when they were a child and they…but there is also a self-critique about their own decisions. In the cases of many of them that follow their man or took decisions like that. So, there is a critique of who do I…they even wrote about new identity, who they are now, how they pass through that. But well, it's local projects, small things, how do we take this…

CTM: What's interesting though about this project and even some of the others you talked about—the early project in Chiapas—it seems to me that some of the threads there are about coming together across various forms of differences, okay, class, ethnicity, whatever, dispossession, wealth, professionalization, you know—

LEC: Experiences.

CTM: Other kinds of peasant experiences, coming together across those differences and actually finding ways to build community and culture. Because also part of the critique of why the Che Guevara-ism and other forms of left social movements and organizing doesn't—I think doesn't—work is because there isn't enough attention paid to the kinds of cultures that social movements generate. And so, if those cultures end of being profoundly violent, masculinist cultures they automatically alienate lots and lots of groups of people. But when you come across differences and sit in the same space, sit around a table and create certain things together, like in this project,

write poetry together, create a video together, do those kinds of things...when you, in the earlier project, are able to get people across those divides actually teach each other what the legal…what forms of justice are seen as the right forms of justice, it feels to me like what happens is there is a new culture that's created, which is about how you sustain each other. And you don't have to become each other. It's what Audre used to say**:** you don't have to become each other in order to work together but in order to work together you have to actually do something more than just mobilize against external violence, mobilize against structural injustice. You have to build something together. And that's—

AHC: Just as an anecdote from this project, the first book they published is called "Under the Shadow of the Guamúchil". Guamúchil is the only tree in the jail. And all the indigenous—

CTM: The only tree?

AHC: Tree.

CTM: Ahan, ok.

AHC: Everything is cement. Cement?

CTM: Cement, yeah.

AHC: Cement, and there was a tree there. And all the rural women and the indigenous women were under the shadow of the Guamúchil doing art-crafts.

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And all the—there is no middle class there—all the more urban women with some kind of schooling were taking the courses, the seminars, the yoga classes, because there are many things happening in jail. And so, we decided to take the writing workshop under the shadow of the Guamúchil and we got together. And many of them had never been together in the same space in jail. Because inside the jail it is so, so segregated.

CTM: There are cliques, yeah.

AHC: So, people that have more schooling would be able to take more courses and would be more interested in those kinds of things. So, the way we work is that they were working with each other during the week and telling the story, one was writing that. But once a month, we read aloud a story and reading aloud was also a moment of community building. Very emotional moment in which—you can tell a story to

somebody but when you listen to your own story being written by this other person, aloud, it's a very emotional moment. But also, it was an opportunity to discuss issues of racism within the jail, because part of the stories were how I felt when I arrived here and I didn't speak Spanish, and everybody was making fun of me. So, in these rituals of community building there were two occasions—two of the urban women asked for forgiveness to the rural ones for the way they had treated her before. Because of racism that—in Mexico, we don't use the word "racism" a lot, for other reasons, but people do not call that—they more easily say "discrimination". But it's a racist issue—"if you're an indigenous rural woman, you must be behind". This issue that finally we can be able to share our differences but also to see our own violence. The way we have exercised violence against all others that are different than us. It's very important. So, at the end some of their books had to do with their life stories but also with their dialogues. What it means for me to be able to talk to you, what I learn from you? They were able to write what they wanted so in the middle they said, "Well, I always thought that I had suffered a lot and now I realize how privileged I have been even when I am here because of these—" and they start of discuss. And I think you're right. I think a very important part for political mobilization is to be able to build community. And the bet [sic] of many of these neoliberal states is to individualize, is to divide, is to split, so I think that to build a community of solidarity it's a big challenge. Now there is a huge debate in Latin America and there was a conference organized by some activists about the Commons that goes beyond the indigenous communities, because there is always in Latin America, a link between communality and the common and rural areas and there are things also going on in urban areas about how to rebuild these commons. And well, jail seems like one of the spaces that is totally against solidarity and the commons but there are things going on in those spaces, too.

CTM: That's so interesting.

LEC: Very. You know, the individualism of neoliberalism is…you're so right, that creates the divisions and we have to figure out how to cross those divisions, as Chandra was saying. we say, "Well, community organizing does it in this kind of way". Like, we create collectivity and out of that we get community that creates collective action on some level. You know the old leftist model of what I will now call—I like your terms—the Guevara-ism *[laughter]*—what made that really effective is seeing that there are all these communities that can come together under a shared knowledge and understanding of who the enemy is—and the enemy is the ruling class, yeah? And so that can really move across the divisions and has been very effective moving across the divisions because there is one central enemy. And that's the ruling class. If we understand that then we're all working towards something that can really benefit everybody. But this individualism is really—

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There is no possibility of having a whole collective action. You can have collectivities, little ones here and there, but you can't have something larger. And I'm pointing to that to say then what is the hope of your experiences and all that you have talked about in these groups which are so effective and so powerful—I mean these women writing these books in prison is phenomenal—of that becoming something larger? Because it has to, no? Because it's in Chiapas today, someplace else in Mexico tomorrow. How do we get it beyond that? This is not for you personally but it's a larger question that I'm thinking it. Because as an Old Guard leftist I see what the positives were. I completely disagreed with how they worked. I felt disgusted that there was no understanding of the woman question and even when we tried to engage that the kinds of things that we had to confront—and I see the failures of feminism in that way. But then what?

AHC: Well, I have a previous—before I answer your question—I think that another challenge is—you say that before, we knew who the enemy was and also the kind of popular education methodology, the intellectual or the activist knew what was the right message that he wanted to bring to the collective space of popular education and there was a lot of epistemological arrogance in that attitude.

LEC: That's right.

AHC: That was a truth that he had, that he will bring to that space and to raise the consciousness of those people. I mean, it was a great group of very committed people but there were many things going on in that exchange. And I feel the other challenge now is that I feel that with many of these de-colonial critiques to ourselves as intellectuals, one issue is that my truth as a feminist of what is emancipation and what is justice is not necessarily what they imagine or what they want. So, to arrive to the space of encounter, open to a dialogue in which I am willing to de-stabilize my certainties is not as powerful as arriving with the truth. It's a lot easier to get there with the truth than to get there and say well, I just want to see what can we build. And how we have been struggling for years to have a better law against domestic violence and they don't give a damn about that law because they don't want their husbands to be in jail for fifteen years instead of two. They want them to work in the community, community work, doing something else. I mean, and just putting an example of it...so, I think it also makes us less powerful as activists, because, at least in my case, I feel that I don't want to go there to share truth. I want to go there to search together and that makes your figure less appealing than when you go there with something to…so, I feel that is the first—I always say the first step will be to be able to de-stabilize your certainties and be humble enough to say, well, I'm searching. And how do we go from the local to the global? I think those are the big challenges. I was telling Chandra about an experience, that I was invited in Peru, it's called the University of Social Movements and it's being promoted among other people by Boaventura de Sousa Santos linked to the World Forum. Linked, but is not a university of the World Forum. But people that got together through that wanted to do something else. And

the bet [sic] there is to bring together people from different social movements**:** graffiti kids, feminists, Afro-American, autonomy Basque people [sic], anarchists to share their struggles, their strategies for struggle and to discuss their differences with scholars that from activist research work with those movements. So for the scholar it is like can you translate your knowledge to a language in which social movements can feel identified and what way would you do is good for them, what would can they take from them?

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AHC: So it's just a challenging of pedagogical training and but for them also it's like get together and talk. See what can you do. And I was telling—big challenge there. I mean from religion people that bet a lot from religion and the anarchist Basque that are very secular and anti-religion to methodologist people that feel that they old popular education methodologists are passé and you have to do graffiti or something more—

CTM: In your face.

ACH**:** In your face, no? So it's a challenge but I feel that at least those are things that are happening now, it didn't happen when we had our leader that hid the truth. And now at least we can…try to listen and learn to recognize. Something interesting for example that happened in that encounter was that one of the elders that was very active in Guatemala, a Maya man, against the money said I never imagined that not like gay people was hate. And well at least that thinking that—

CTM: So some of it is also that what's important about this would be—it sets up these encounters which normally don't get set up. I mean part of the impact of neo-liberalism is also to tell us that these are all separate struggles and therefore people and to not make it possible for people anyway in terms of resources and geographies and stuff to talk to each other about any of this stuff. So yes we get together and we are hoping that people see what it means to talk about the intersectionality of social movements, but we have a long way to go to there, obviously. Because mostly people are speaking from their spaces, but if everybody is there in good faith to both speak and listen then you are right exactly this kind of impact can happen and it can happen with individuals who have power in their own social spaces and social movements, right? So there is a potential here for building—if nothing else a culture of people who are hearing the way people who are very different from them, but are engaged in fights for freedom and justice. Actually approach—and strategize what it is they need to do because most of the time, those kind of people don't get together right? I mean I'm thinking when was the last time; we have feminist conferences where people who

identify as feminist come together, right? We have the left forum, where almost no feminists end up, right? So those things are very—really very separate.

AHC: Something that I missed in this encounter, I was thinking a lot of how—how to set it in a more accessible way—is that I feel that besides like "I respect your struggle, I know now homophobia—" if we were able as scholars in those spaces to explain that this common enemy that will be this neo-liberal capitalist system or whatever—it is also built with this gender inequalities, these colonial legacies, with this sexual—but to phrase it not just as a slogan, but to be able…so you have then—my struggle becomes your struggle—because to this structure this, we cannot keep racism alive just with anti-capitalist—if we don't consider it racism we cannot—

CTM: Do anti-capitalistic work!

AHC: But I think that this—that the issue in those encounters—it is not only that I have to have solidarity with your struggle, but to be able to see how our struggles are so embedded, but to show it besides saying intersectionality.

CTM: I know I agree completely.

LEC: Show that they're interlinked to the impact on each of us and all of us simultaneously.

CTM: Which will then make it a common enemy as well, but a complicated common enemy.

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LEC: Because the common enemy then would be within and not without. It is easier to mark the common enemy without.

CTM: That's true. So it would have to be tackled both reflectively and—

LEC: It's work we would all have to do, must do to move to the next step.

LEC: So, this has been really, really phenomenal, this has been a really interesting discussion. It kind of took care of all of our questions and it went past some of our questions. It's really intense. And you know your experiences have been exactly what we have been talking about in this project, but they come together at different levels and different people with you they are all together. So we want to ask you to—reflecting backwards look at what has happened, what you have experienced, what you have done, all this work, then what you'd lived and looking forward, what kind of society do you envision as tomorrow in Mexico and beyond for women? It seems

huge and mega-question but it's your discussion and experiences that really make this question pertinent.

AHC: Well I think that one of the main issues now—I think we share the same concerns about what neo-liberalism is doing, but besides that in our case its violence and with violence that has touched me personally. I live in a community; it's a rural community outside the city of Cuernavaca that has been taken by the cartels. And for the last five years, I have been losing people that I care. A few weeks before I came here my swimming teacher was killed. And he was the teacher of my son since young age and he was an Olympic and now in his 70s but he was an Olympic—

CTM: Athlete.

AHC: Athlete, and now an old man and he was killed. So now my main—one of the ideal things that I would like to see is a different kind of society. Not just a different kind of state, of course different kind of state, but the sad things is that this violence has permeated daily life. We have young people killing young people. And how this happened in the last—the community where I live is called Ocotepec, is a community in the late 70s and 80s was an experiment of the liberation theology to build autonomy and they were reading the bible, all this idea of ecclesiastical community of faith that are used in the bible for self-critique and there was a bishop, a leftist bishop very well known, Sergio Mendez Arceo who lived here and he promoted the construction of community because the best community project of the church is building community, getting people together to read the bible and you do a critique of the system but also critique of your life. And one of the reasons I decided to move to this community was because of this history, this genealogy, and I brought a house there—and now the goddaughters and godsons of these people are involved with the cartels. And many of them have killed people at fourteen or have been killed and so I panic and I say, "How in two generations we lost this collective memory? What happened?" And I was interviewing one of the elders one day, there in the community and he told me, what we did wrong, why were we were not able to transmit our values because many of those kids are doing those things not, we can say out of need, but their parents were also poor. It also the need for consumption, of certain kinds of goods, they couldn't consume. They want to have iPhones, iPads, so there is a cultural thing going on there that is very strong. So I would like to see a Mexico in which we can recover the values of dignity and respect for life. In which we can build community together in difference. In which towns like Ocotepec can recover its memory and its legacy of community building.

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And we cannot be able to rescue our young people from those cultures and of course the challenge is a lot bigger than changing the man or the men that governs my

country because if we are only the official party of priests many people say or only the state and its institutions that are very marked by impunity and corruption but it goes beyond that. It goes to the daily life of people. What kind of values? What kind of conception of life and death is there? So I imagine the possibility of going back to these young people and being able to communicate and being able to influence or in a certain way—what is the important thing about a different kind of life. And of course the respect, the difference between urban and rural, indigenous…how can we build that? And I totally agree with these people that are now talking about how to rebuild a common. I think that the bet [sic] is—it is not just to dissolve the individual and is not like this big community utopia but it's so—networks of that allow you to have a social interaction and a common space can be rebuilt in a country, which we don't even have public space anymore. In a place where I live—that is not everywhere in old Mexico, but where I live we don't have a public space. We cannot go out to a public space after five o'clock, so how can we recover this? And I think we have to—when I was interviewing this elder and he was almost crying saying, 'how can we recover this memory, how can we put this knowledge of those people that built community in the past as a valuable inheritance for the new generations that are there. I think that that's the challenge.

CTM: It's such an interesting and poignant way of talking about building new publics, when the physical space itself is unavailable because of the everyday violence. Some of the work we are doing is around sort of creating new publics and that's partly what you are talking about that—it's a way of creating communities but that believe in different values, in a different conception of what it means to be a human being and treat other people with dignity and compassion, et cetera.

LEC: And having a value for life of your own and others—a value for life, it just seems like that is what's missing. There is such an intense focus on materiality that…as you are saying this, there are so many little countries in the Caribbean, people are breaking into people's homes. Just to get what they have. There's a focus on materiality that's gone berserk.

AHC: And do you know what else—I am very concerned and sad about it—is that the lack of respect to life and to your own life. Because many of those young men have learned, since very young that their life has no value. So they can risk their life for an iPhone if they lose, they die, if they don't have an iPhone. So it's such a—they are willing to take many risk because the sense of time, the sense of history is missing.

CTM: And are they mainly young men?

AHC: There are many young men, I have a colleague her name is Mariana Moraes; a beautiful woman I want to you to meet. She is working with the issue of Ayotzinapa,

the forty-three guys that were kidnapped and they have disappeared. And she has started to work with young racialized men. What is the kind of profile of these men? And it's usually between—and she was presenting some statistics of how—who are those men? Many of those men that disappear because there are also many disappearances, men and women, are between fifteen and twenty-five. And I don't know if you have heard the news, but there are common graves all over the country and those are the kind of bodies they are finding.

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CTM: Yeah, so something is happening to that particular generation. That is both systematic and much deeper—

LEC: Like the elder was saying to you.

CTM: Thank you, Aida this has been wonderful and we have been talking to Aida Hernández Castillo and today is the 1st of June. Thank you. It's been wonderful.

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Feminist Freedom Warriors (FFW) is a first of its kind digital video archive and documentary project. Born out of an engagement in anti-capitalist, anti-racist struggles as women of color from the Global South, this project is about cross-generational histories of feminist activism addressing economic, anti-racist, social justice and anti-capitalist issues across national borders.