Donna Nevel

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CTM: Yeah, ok so, Donna, welcome. So today we're talking to Donna Nevel and today is the 7th of May 2016 and we're completely delighted to have you here.

DN: I'm really happy to be here.

CTM: Thank you. This conversation is really about your own kind of narrative, story about your own politicization and commitments to larger struggles and the way you think about them. So, say a little bit about how you would describe how you came to feminist praxis, in whatever form you want to describe it.

DN: Well, I was thinking about this in terms of my role models and I think my mother was a critical role model for me. I don't know that I ever heard the word feminism spoken by her, but she was just the example of that strong, passionate, filled with integrity—she was her own person. I grew up hearing from her and my father be proud of who you are but never think you're better than another human being. More than what she said, it was how she treated every human being. So I felt from a very young age—and it was interesting because it was about her as a woman, but also as a human being in the world and so it had a very strong impact on me. My mother drove around town on a bicycle. She never drove a car, but she was fiercely independent. She had her baskets for the groceries on the backseat of her bicycle and she would go around town and she got a bicycle built for two where she dropped me off at like birthday parties or when I was going to school. And she was a dancer and you know, did yoga in the 50s—was doing a lot of things—she was who she was. And even though it was a more traditional breakdown in the family of my father was the one going out to work, my mom taught Jewish literature and she did things but she was spending more time at home with her five children. I was the middle of five. I think the level of respect that my father always showed to her, that was sort of was around and that we had for her, was just really foundational for me and really had a big impact. And I think the other person, when I was in high school I read Emma

Goldman and I was just blown away by who she was in the world and also thinking about the different connections of different issues…how she talked about so many different issues of economic injustice and issues around women and feminism. I actually, when I read this book in high school I said, if I ever have a daughter one day I want to name her Emma—

CTM: And that's what you did!

DN: That's what I did. So that was my beginning, was really I think both my mom and Emma Goldman were these very formidable influences on me and on my life. And then when I went to college and I spent time I got involved with a Marxist development program and that's where I started meeting women from Zimbabwe and Mozambique and that's really where I got connected to the whole looking at the different intersections and connections between different forms of oppression, and they came from Zimbabwe and Mozambique and so were sharing with us and it was at the time of liberation movements they had—

LEC: Anti-apartheid.

DN: Right. So they were able to share with us and so that was very—and at that time also in that program there was a lot of talk about culture and identity, and really being proud of who you are. I identified strongly as a Jewish woman and it was very much not about don't be who you are, but come and recognize who we are, what we each bring to it and again that helped shape me a lot in thinking about being very respectful of those who are part of and leading movements for change and at the same time being a partner in those movements and also being engaged within my own community. And so it was at that time where I also started to get involved in Israel and Palestine and early on I got involved through the Israeli women's movement and then the Palestinian women's movement, where I remember the first time I went to Berzeit University, I guess in my very early twenties—

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CTM: So, like what time period?

DN: So these are the '70s. And sitting with a group of women who were talking about kind of liberation struggles. In those days I had entered the Palestintian-Israeli peace movement through 1967 so, it was really I had an opposition to the occupation of '67. Later on, I learned about the *Nakba* so of course, I then learned about what happened leading up to the creation of Israel and that really moved my activism and my organizing in a particular way because it's really where you enter is very, very different. And at that point also, I began to learn much more, while I was organizing

as a Jewish woman in Jewish groups, but standing very strongly in solidarity with Palestinian groups, who really were shaping the movement and the issues in terms of Right of Return and Equal Rights for All and looking at a piece of—you know, wasn't really dividing it up from '67 but was looking at what had happened prior to the Zionist movement. So, that again had a big impact on how I viewed my own role and also looking at change and transformation. Should I keep going into some of the—?

CTM: Just mark it for us because these histories are important.

DN: And then my family and I, we lived in Costa Rica for two years, I guess some twenty odd years ago now. Actually, I gave birth to Emma in Costa Rica. It was me and my husband Alan and our son Alex. Living in Costa Rica, we got to work with—we had planned to go for six months but then we were asked to continue the work with an indigenous rights group led by members of the indigenous community called Iriria Tsochok. I had heard about PAR—Participatory Action Research—and popular education but it was the first time I really saw it in action. And I saw where the rhetoric wasn't just rhetoric and that had a profound impact on my as a human being, as a feminist, as kind of the way I looked at again, looked at again how to think about struggle and this goes back to my mother because my parents didn't have much formal education but they were two of the wisest, smartest, most knowledgeable human beings I knew and I was just thinking yesterday, I remember when I was in high school, a girl I liked very much, her mother had a PhD and her mother was having a gathering. And she came to me and she said, I would've liked your mother to be invited but my mom said your mom doesn't even have a college education and this is for women who are accomplished, or something like that. And I remember saying to her, my mother has more wisdom and knowledge in her little finger, more than your mother has in her whole body! But I always thought about that, because I had grown up with people who were so wise and who valued—my parents just valued multiple forms of wisdom and knowledge—that's just how I grew up. You know, the older people in our community were revered, which actually wasn't that common within my community. As the Jewish community became more affluent, I almost felt there was this lack of respect for our elders. And my parents really resisted that. And so, in Costa Rica, you know the heart of PAR is really to value a community's own knowledge and wisdom, and seeing that—we would go to Talamanca where many of the members of the indigenous community were living, and do community workshops together and the women asked me to work with them on an economic development project and economic empowerment project and really looking at women as part of the, reclaiming their history which was part of a project that they were engaged with, it was also reclaiming women's role in the community and the power of women in the community. That had such an impact on me, and of course again, always thinking about we were coming in as outsiders but very much embraced by the community so that was about who we were and our role but also joining in. I always thought a lot about that. How do you do that respectfully? Because it can also be—I find

sometimes—kind of patronizing to say like I'm not going to enter—almost making it us and them, which of course there are differences and we come from different locations but I feel like it's also about joining together and that's shaped and informed my work a lot.

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Chandra knows I do a lot of my work on Palestine and challenging Islamophobia, you know Jewish Voice for Peace or Jews Say No and that's important for me because I feel like I can be a real partner, in the struggle and at the same time hold my own community accountable and be principled and effective in that way. Jumping around a little, but back to Costa Rica and PAR, to me those original feminist principles that I kind of had when I thought about what it means to be a feminist were embodied, resonated with my commitment to PAR—about valuing the knowledge and wisdom of a community—notion of challenging outside expertise coming into a community to tell a community what its needs are. That, to me, really grew out of those principles that they were in sync with or compatible with. They didn't go against those other principles. So I guess when I think of feminism and think of my identity as a feminist—and I understand there are so many different layers—I think of it in that kind of, I guess—PAR embraces that for me and it necessarily, and I guess all the struggles I've been part of, the connections with race and class and gender and different forms of oppression, necessarily come together because that's the lived experience. And I guess my work grows out of the communities I've been part of and I've been organizing with. The other major impact on my identity in the world was when we came back from Costa Rica, we had really the great honor, luck of becoming part of the Bloomingdale Family Head Start Program where our children went to pre-school because I taught the women's literacy program and in exchange my children got to go to the program. That community is a community—my children's friends from when they were in pre-school and the women we became a community with, are still our community today, among our closest community today. In fact, at Emma's graduation next week—she's graduating college next week—the family that we became closest to, wanted to come out to California together with us because we're all so connected to each other's families. And it was also an example of—I worked with women, with the mothers, we worked together, but it was such an embracing community, it was about respect for all people, for every member of the community—

CTM: And it was very multi-racial.

DN: Multi-racial, it was very rooted in a community's wisdom and knowledge. And this was a preschool where to get the children from the preschool into our public schools became very, very difficult. It's a very segregated and unequal district. I always say I'm involved with the issues that are apartheid in Israel and apartheid in

the Upper West Side, Manhattan, around public education. So that's been an issue that many of us have been working on and through that, the Center for Immigrant Families got created, which was a group of mostly low-income immigrant women of color, many of whom were parents at the head start center, and community members like myself whose children went to the community schools. And together we then got engaged with a struggle, all women really, to challenge segregation and inequality in our public schools and really to talk about this notion of who owns the schools—the public schools—and should you be able to get into a school because of how much money you have or who you know or what zip-code you're in. So that's been a struggle and that's also had a profound impact on me in terms of just how much I've learned together with the women I've been doing this with.

CTM: See, what's interesting to me is, ever since I've known you, you've been very instrumental in actually forming certain organizations and yet every time you talk about these organizations, you never take credit actually for instigating a lot of this, which to me is really important because I think there is a clue here about how to build solidarities and collectives that it doesn't become "I did this, or I did that, or I am providing something for somebody else", which is the service orientation.

LEC: So, I wanna raise something in that context, because I think that comes from a particular kind of background that teaches one about collectivity rather than self, community above the individual, which is what you're describing.

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So, I wanna ask in relation to that, what were some of the challenges—because I am sure there were many—because when you find situations like that where across groups, across ethnicity, across race—I mean what's now called intersectional work…there's always resistance, there's always, in some cases, attacks, and it usually is directed at the white women.

DN: Those are good questions. First, just to say a minute about what you were saying, Chandra. I appreciate that you're saying that I played a key role but actually it's accurate that they were community collective efforts. That's really, really true, it's not me just being modest. They really were. And even with Center for Immigrant Families, a couple of us like, did the beginning, but it was two years later actually when Ujju Aggarwal joined us, we always identify that as the beginning because she really helped build it in such meaningful ways. So I always feel like I want to honor that because it's so easy to say, "I did this" when in fact, there were so many people. I'm always thinking about the question you asked. In terms of my role, I'm white, I'm Jewish, I'm upper middle class, I'm heterosexual married to a civil rights lawyer. So I'm very kind of, aware of who I am, at the same time what you were talking about—and there are some people who at times have been like, you know, who's this

woman—but for those of us who build the community together, like at Center for Immigrant Families, the work to challenge segregation I was very much part of, I was at the schools but we also had women circles that were women of color circles. There were other spaces that were just women of color. And at some point I was one of maybe two white women associated with the organization but it was very open and genuine, so we thought about it together, we talked about it together. But also, let's say the media, for example. There'd be a gathering and the media would come to me, right, because of class, race, you know, everything, right? And so, it was very important to say, "No, I'm actually not the spokesperson". Then there were times when those who would work with me would say, "But Donna, in some ways you're also making yourself invisible. So we don't want to do that either." I mean there was once a time when I was at a meeting with Center for Immigrant Families mothers and we were talking together about something in the school and I, thinking I was being very sensitive, said something about being different—I'm not this—and they were like, "Donna, you're part of our community. We understand, of course, we're not the same. You have privilege we don't have. You know, we understand you can walk into a school and they're gonna treat you differently. But you chose to send your kids to schools where they respect all families. And that really hit me. I've thought a lot about it afterwards, of wanting to be thoughtful, but also a little bit of this "us and them" that I was actually participating in. And again, though, at the same time it is important to be very aware that I was living differently and I could walk into any school on the Upper West Side and they would be catering to me, while that's not the same with the women that I was with. It's a constant struggle. On Palestine and Islamophobia I really like being part of Jewish groups because I feel it does then hold us accountable. So, one, I like to do the work in my own community because there is a hell of a lot of work to do [laughs] both around fighting Islamophobia and changing the narrative around Zionism and support for Palestine. So, I just consider that a big part of the work even if it's not so much fun all the time. But I also want to be able to be a partner in the broader struggle…Palestinian led Boycott Divestment and Sanctions Movement and other things, so I feel like doing that as Jewish Voice for Peace or Jews Say No—I've heard this actually more from within the Jewish community, Jewish leftists who have said, "But, you know, I feel like it's privileging the Jewish voice" like in some ways they're questioning being part of a Jewish group, while I actually feel that it enables us to really think about our role much more intentionally. So, right or wrong, that's how I've navigated that world. It's felt most genuine to me to do my work for justice in Palestine as a Jew.

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And same thing in challenging Islamophobia—and being part of broader coalitions, broader groups. So that's in that regard—it's interesting in Costa Rica though, maybe because we were so—from the United States—and it was funny because the group at first, when we first went to say, "We're here, we'd love to do anything you need

support for." They told us later on, they were like, "These Gringos are here. We don't want—". They'd had terrible experiences. But then they said that but they saw that we were willing to do anything and then we became really connected. Oh, the other thing about Costa Rica, our time there, was that you know how you always have to think about your children and your work life? It was so much a community so that when we had the gatherings, everybody took turns taking care of children. The older children took care of the younger children so it was a real community. But that, I think, because our identities—we connected with them but because we weren't part of dominant society in Costa Rica—like I'm part of the dominant society in the United States, I'm part of the group that's oppressing others—in Costa Rica I think there because we were from…although of course the US was oppressing everybody but still it was an entry point that at some point I noticed—I was still trying to be careful about it, but it was a different relationship, because here obviously if I walk into a room and I'm with, let's say, friends who are women of color and someone will come to me and say I don't like the way you're being looked at like the other, and I'm like, but nobody in the room knows me. I could just be another asshole white woman who thinks I'm doing great work. I mean honestly, you have to be part of a community for people like—I'm not saying it's always comfortable, but, like okay there's a reason for that.

CTM: So, it's sort of interesting, the way you're talking, in fact about white privilege and Jewish privilege and US privilege as part of identity but it's not formative in the way you actually practice the building of collectivities and communities. Right, because a lot of times that's what happens. People—

LEC: Make the separation.

CTM: Make the separation and a lot of people with power will just say, "Well I, as so and so can't do this." But what's interesting about the way you're talking about this—and I think this is also important about building across differences, right—is that at a certain point one needs to have the courage to step in, right, and to participate, and to participate at whatever level you're called on to participate, rather than at the level of either holding yourself back because it's this level of, "Oh, but I have power, I have privilege, how can I comment, how can I interact?" Right?

LEC: It's that thing of not traveling with white guilt in front of you.

CTM: Yeah, that's right.

DN: And I think part of that is about having real relationships. Honestly, I don't sit there and act in isolation. I'm always interacting and trying to think about—but it's not about the stepping back, because you're right, and I think that replicates—I just feel like it is kind of—in some ways, obviously people often unwittingly, but it's like wait a minute, you're really actually perpetuating what you claim to want to not

perpetuate. And part of that is that you're learning together and you're being part of it together. And if you are listening and caring and like really respecting leadership then you're going to be doing that together. You know I was invited—you know the story—once by a group of, I think it was maybe—it's happened more than once, where Students for Justice in Palestine or a Muslim group will invite me to come and speak on a campus on my role as a Jew challenging Islamophobia. These are groups that are quite politically sophisticated that have all sorts of speakers that bring people and one of them, a Jewish woman, kind of attacked me and said, "Why are you going as a Jew? Why are you taking a Muslim's voice, or a Palestinian's voice? Why are you going and doing that?" I was like wait a minute I was invited by—honestly, if I was invited by Hillel on campus I would go immediately and question them to find out who are you inviting and why—

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But a group that's rooted in the forefront of this work and they invite me, I really trust and I'm going to go and I just thought there was something about the Jewish woman telling me that I shouldn't go to a program that SJP invited me to. You know what I mean? There was that. SJP is exquisitely sensitive to issues of privilege and power. They're a very wonderful group. So that's also the other thing of, like obviously, I think about when I put my voice forward and how but there's also—again, it's not me leading the way in terms of saying this is what I—it's an interactive process.

CTM: You're not leading the way but you're also not stepping back. See I think that's crucial because that's the other white guilt phenomenon, right?

LEC: It becomes paralyzing.

CTM: Yeah—I can't say anything, I can't do anything.

LEC: And so in the face of the collective, the group, the community organizations, whatever you're working with, that's in the way. And so then even though the person maybe there out of a particular kind of consciousness and that's really wonderful, that white guilt thing paralyzes on a certain level. And so what you're saying is you recognize how debilitating that can be and you have done work and continue to do work to keep that out of the way because the work that you want to do is much more interesting. And the people that you're working with you're learning so much from and you think that, you know, that's what you really want to engage in.

DN: Right, and I want to be intentional and thoughtful, but I want to keep doing it. And if I was doing something and friends of mine from other communities had said, we were looking at this action that you all did and we were thinking that would make it stronger, that might be—of course, that would be very important to me because it's

always about learning and growing and thinking, how can you be part of groups that play meaningful roles and think about those roles.

CTM: So, talk a little bit about some of the different grassroots organizations that you've been a part of around some of these issues. And concretely, what were the challenges? What were the success strategies for doing this kind of work as a feminist?

DN: Yeah and I also want to be sure to talk about, more recently, PARCEO because that sort of brought together a lot of work. So maybe I'll talk about PARCEO for a minute and then go back. So PARCEO is a Participatory Action Research Center and it's a number of women who have come together and it really originally…at the Center for Immigrant Families, when we were there, a lot of groups were always asking us, "Could you share with us your model of—," because CIF really rooted its work in PAR principles and our project to challenge segregation was very much, we really documented hundreds of parents' stories of exclusion from the public schools. All these outside researchers had come into our district saying like, "District 3 is segregated in—," but they were like shelved. Nobody did anything with them. But this grew out of the real lived stories and so a lot of groups would come from really, different parts of the country, asking us, "Can you share your model?" So, later on that's how PARCEO evolved thinking we really wanted to be able to come together and share and work together with community groups who wanted to integrate PAR and again the centrality of the community's wisdom and knowledge in their organizing. And then after that we realized we want to work with institutions who work with community groups to sort of help that build in a thoughtful way. So that really grew out of all of us coming together from lots of different experience with social justice work, teaching, arts, cultural resistance work and different work. I would say, for me, the work with the Center for Immigrant Families and Iriria Tsochok were the two organizations that have most shaped my work in PARCEO. I think those experiences, so—those were two. And then, around Palestine and Islamophobia—we have the Network Against Islamophobia, Jews Say No and Jewish Voice for Peace are where I've done most of the Palestine work in recent years.

CTM: Do you think that these communities are feminist communities?

DN: That's interesting. I was thinking about that with JVP because I've talked to the director and others from JVP—it's definitely feminist principles that guide the organization. It's really interesting. So, Jewish Voice for Peace started in a living room. It was really like, a few radical Jews got together and over the years it's grown.

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I joined their board a couple of years ago now. I used to have this thing, I don't want to be part of large organizations. I love working with sort of small, community based, grassroots organizations. But JVP, I really admire the way they've grown and I think it's because they really are—it's so rooted in communities and also on a daily basis it's so connected to the Palestinian-led movement and so it's very much about working within the Jewish community and at the same time being a very responsible, responsive, effective partner. So I've seen the growth. I always joke with the, I say it's the first time I actually love an organization as it's grown. I don't think it's lost its soul. And of course, the bigger you are—and this is what's interesting about the question you asked before—some people from the outside are saying, "Well, JVP better be careful now that it's growing…doesn't take over too much." And I'm like, first of all, obviously JVP thinks about its role, and should, all the time, as a Jewish voice, because there are a lot of issues about—again the media will come to interview a Jew—at the same time though we have to consider that a positive challenge to our growth. Our growth is wonderful. We're part of a growing global movement. But, so it's about how do we do that again, in a way that's interacting with a movement and respectful of a movement. Not stepping back, but actually thinking about how do we move forward in a way that doesn't recreate any of the things we want to—

LEC: Dismantle.

DN: Yes, dismantle. But that we also don't unwittingly do it by—almost the reverse of it. And it was interesting because Angela Davis spoke at the last JVP national membership meeting and she said exactly that. She was like, JVP, it's very important that this is a Palestinian-led movement but please don't step back, use your voice. And again, that's not to say, I'm part of conversations a lot, you know, there are a lot of spaces where Palestinian's voices are excluded. But that's all very critical in our work. Or like who will support which organizations? But that's part of the broader picture that again, we don't in isolation decide this is what we should do. We do it as part of interacting with a movement. Like how do we make sure all voices are valued and respected? And again, who's deciding that? That shouldn't be taking place separately in a room. It should be part of—and that's one of the questions I always ask about, from square one, how does something get started? Because I've been at countless meetings where they were like, "Oh, we really gotta get a Palestinian on this panel," and you're like, wait a second, you know what? This should be dismantled. Start from square one. There's something off. Or you know, you can hear…we used to get called at CIF all the time—"We're having this thing, we need a Latino spokesperson". I mean literally all the time. "We need an immigrant…" So, that's one of the things, too, to be thinking about. How is—
CTM: How something starts.

DN: How it starts. Whose interests are being served and whose interests aren't being served. What voices are—and that can take place in lots of ways that—we all know certain people who talk certain talk but then the practice is so—whatever the opposite

of liberatory is.

CTM: Yeah, yeah.

LEC: *[Laughs]* Oppressive.

CTM: *[Laughs]* Oppressive is the opposite of liberatory. Yes, so she's kind of answered our question about—which is—yeah—

LEC: What do you see, Donna, as the best way across—so, since you've done this so well and you've been doing this for so long and you understand it because you're actually living it. How would you communicate this to other feminists—white feminists, say—about working across race, ethnicity, class, you know, to build solidarity?

DN: I think—the things I'm saying are all the things I say to myself, right? One is, always challenge this notion of expertise. You know, it's so easy to think that you've done this and you're the expert, and you know it better than someone else. I mean, all the forms of that kind of comes out.

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LEC: But I'm not asking you the question from that positionality, like how would you teach them to do this? It's that hearing a number of younger white women in particular who really want to do something different and admire people like yourself.

I mean, like, PARCEO's work is really well known, yeah? So, they want to figure out how do you do this? How do you launch into this? And it's not that how to I'm asking you to tell them or teach them as the expert. But what do you see as problematic with so much of the attempt, so many of the attempts and it not happening anyway?

DN: I think one of the things actually that I would encourage people is just one level, but multi-age—

LEC: Interesting.

DN: I'm surprised how many—I work closely with women of all ages and I'm finding it's more unusual than I thought. People you really develop close relationships with, not just the mentor and the mentee. And I think even though we all often have this rhetoric like young people's voices matter, but like actually, how do we show that in practice? How do we actually live that, not just talk it? So that's one thing I would say, is like, really take that seriously. The different ways we all are

bringing that knowledge and wisdom. You know, I really love the word wisdom because there's something about it that's—I don't know, just—so deep.

LEC: Spans time.

DN: Yeah. So I think look, that I just—I'm very, very lucky. I have three wonderful children and my youngest is my daughter in college now. She and her friends who are incredible. Sitting around a dinner table I've learned so much and I then bring that to what I'm doing. So I would say part of it is try to be part of different spaces. Outside even, maybe the—you might sit with a group of like-minded people that think that but think about are there ways you can expand that? I would also say that it's not just about discussing things together but get in there and do some of the work together. I think what shaped my work challenging Islamophobia was for three years day in and day out I became part of a group working to reinstate a Muslim principal of the first dual-launguage public school in New York City--first Arabic-English dual language school in New York City. And a vicious smear campaign went out against her. Her name is Debbie Almontaser. Literally a vicious smear campaign. And then the Department of Education…I mean it was a long story that then had to do with Palestine and nothing having to do with her, but the Islamophobes connected her. And the Department of Education then fired her and it was—I'll tell you the story in one minute. So, she was starting a school, the Islamophobes found out. They went off and said it's going to be a terrorist school, the whole thing, but the DoE stood behind her and even some Jewish organizations stood behind her. And then there was a group called Arab Women Active in the Arts and Media, a wonderful young women's' group, and they had made a t-shirt that said "Intifada NYC" as part of a girls' group of talking about—because you know intifada means, sort of like girls being strong—s o she served on the board of an organization where they used office space. So the group had nothing to do with her. It was a wonderful group anyhow. Anyhow, they linked her with the t-shirts which she had nothing to do with. Then the press went crazy. The New York Post called her the Intifada Principal, did a horrible story. I used to travel with her on the train and literally people would look up because she was all over the press. The most Islamophobic, racist, I mean, really, really vile. Instead of standing up for her—because, of course, it was the state that had the power to keep her there. Islamophobes could scream and yell but it was the DoE and the Mayor of New York that said," Well, she's not a terrorist but we're glad she's stepping down" because of this controversy. They pretended that she resigned. For three years a coalition of activists, a legal team, all worked together and what we made, which was very important to us, was that—AWAAM—Arab Women Active in the Arts and Media—was the center of the work. Because we were not going to let it be divided into the "good Muslim" and the "bad Muslim." Like okay, she was okay…no, this was about Islamophobia. But it was through that work, to this day we're all—we're not all part of the same organization anymore—but we're all deeply connected in the work we're doing.

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So, my—to get back to my long winded answer to your question—is that it's about being there and doing what's needed and thinking about whose voices are part of that because that could've been very easily co-opted, that coalition by people who are like—I mean, a group came to us, a group of liberal Jews, and said, "You're not doing Debbie any favors by working with this group AWAAM. They made the intifada t-shirts". And so, we were like, sorry! But if that had happened, by fighting, they would have, in her name. promoting Islamophobia. You know what I mean? It's like looking at the different layers. So I would say to groups, to young people, just be there, learn. Bring yourself, bring your skills. Of course, it's not about not bringing your skills but also recognize that there's lots of learning to do and lots of other people who are gonna to come to that. And again, with media, I thought—you know, I do a lot of work with media and so I in some way was ready probably to say okay I'll do the media stuff but AWAAM had done young women's media. So, we worked together and it was like, we learned so much together. It was about coming in and recognizing that. So that's kind of, I think, the messaging I would say. Just be there and be open to learning. Does that answer your question?

LEC: Yeah.

CTM: Yeah.

LEC: That's really clear.

CTM: So what do you hope? What is your hope for the kind of world you want to see with the work that you're doing?

LEC: Especially now.

CTM: At this time when a lot of what we do gets completely commodified and appropriated.

LEC: And seems the possibility exists for it to be challenged more and erased in some cases on a large state acknowledgement level.

DN: Yeah.

LEC: The way this election's going, we don't know—

DN: No, and I don't want to be like Pollyannaish because I know it's just—

CTM: It's a hard time.

DN: It's a very hard—

CTM: But it's probably a time of possibility.

DN: I feel that because of the groups that I am connected to, I feel like—I mean, just even looking at—even though it's been so much—look at Israel right now. I mean, it's just—things have gotten worse and worse and worse. One of the things about being involved for a long time is seeing how much strength there is in the movement right now. I just feel like there is a lot of integrity and there's a lot of communities working together that wasn't exactly the case when I started working on. There was work going on and there was always work coming out of the Palestinian community. You know, sometimes people say, oh this work is new but as we know with all social movements, there's a real long history. Organizing in Palestine has been going on for a long time, you know, real strong resistance. That, by the way, is one of the other things I would say to young people coming in. Yes, we're doing great things and it doesn't need to minimize all the wonderful things happening, but there's such a history of resistance that we constantly need to be building from. And I do think a lot of people do. I'm connected to young people who are always thinking about that in meaningful ways. But I think it's also something for all of us to keep in mind, of all ages. So on that side I think that—you know, a couple of weeks ago I spoke at a CAIR gathering as an ally. That's a Muslim civil rights group. And they're national and so they do a lot of work and they're often attacked. They're one of the groups that gets very viciously attacked. But they brought together for a few days all their chapter leaders and directors and stuff and it was really inspiring to—so they just did a panel where we spoke as allies—but to hear about the work going on in the country, even though, of course, they have to react to so much now because it's attack after attack, but also there's so much thinking about how to build together and so much going on. They really wanted those of us who are partners and allies to come because—and there's been follow up since then. You know sometimes you go and speak and that's it. We've all been on the phone, everyone's building and I feel like that's just really happening—and at PARCEO we see that. So many groups that we've been connecting to and working with are really building with one another across all sorts of communities and lines.

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CTM: So it sounds like paying attention to the work that's on the ground that people are already doing. And that's always been the way to combat despair. It's always been, pay attention to what's happening on the ground and see what people are doing. Because part of the way we stop doing the work or feel like nothing is possible is by allowing ourselves to be isolated or removed from the work and often times that happens in the academy. A lot, right? You start only paying attention to the way our

institutions are changing in horrendous, corporatist, neoliberal ways but you forget that there is actually still a lot of work that you care about that is happening.

LEC: That's right.

CTM: That you could be involved in. Then you allow yourself to be colonized in certain ways. But one form of not allowing that is to actually be connected to work that's happening and find out more about work that's happening.

DN: Right, and you can do that from different places. You can do that from the university.

CTM: Absolutely.

DN: I do know, because of peoples' experiences, a lot of experiences with working with universities has been very—people feel used in real ways. Researched done "on" communities. But there are increasingly examples of the ways communities and universities—a lot of the work that the Democratizing Knowledge project ,right and others are doing I think is very important. So I think it's true. It's seeing it that makes not as—I mean, of course you turn on the—you're like oh my god. But also I just feel like, also issues of class, socialism, communism, Marxism, however people are defining themselves…but that is much more in the forefront now. Of course, with issues around racism and gender justice—so, I feel like there are so many visible and that they are definitely—the connection is made in meaningful ways. I know it's happening in theory, too, but I think they're together. There's really not that separation, which also used to be made, like the thinkers and the doers. Whoa, that is so not true. I mean, you look at some of the thinking that comes out of community organizing and so it's so much of a process that—and the reflection—which is what I like about PAR, too. Like, I say we really have to do that, right? That reflection piece—I know it's hard to make the time but I just feel like it strengthens the work. And taking the time to have those conversations with people. We are right now arranging a gathering of people who are engaged in communities challenging Islamophobia, issues around—challenging racism, gender justice. And just to get some people in a room together to do a round table, to really be able to share more with each other. And the impetus for that was we just need to keep doing that with each other.

CTM: Yeah, that's great. We stop here?

LEC: Yeah.

CTM: Thank you so much.

LEC: It was really wonderful.

DN: Was it?

LEC: It was wonderful.

CTM: Yes, absolutely.

LEC: Really good.

CTM: Yeah, and I think you brought some new stuff. I think you brought some new stuff in.

LEC: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

CTM: Don't you think? What do you all think?

LEC: Deeply reflective, you know?

CTM: Yeah.

KP: I love the thing you said about age and working with different ages.

LEC: Mm-hmm.

KP: I mean obviously I think of this project as well, but in larger spaces—

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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.