Himani Bannerji

11/7/2015

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LEC: So today is November 7, Saturday, and we are here with Himani Bannerji.

CTM: In Toronto.

LEC: In Toronto. And we are really happy that you can do this. You know we've been talking about we're going to come, so we're glad to get you before you go away.

CTM: —go off to India.

LEC: So in these conversations, Himani, what we're doing is trying to start by having a participant tell us how you came to the kind of feminist work you've done and what you see as some of the changes which we'll ask you about more later. But what brought you to the kind of the feminist work you've done?

CTM: And it's almost a question about politicization. What brings you to the kind of politics that have marked your life's work really?

HB: Yeah, well, I came here quite grown up at the age of twenty-seven in 1969, in the summertime. So, I had been teaching at Jadavpur University for five years before then. Teaching in comparative literature and English departments. But as I said the day job was doing that—teaching new things in those days in the 60s in literature like Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton, just beginning. As you know there has been a very pervasively strong communist movement—a party, not just a movement. There has been a movement and a party on top of it, divided between two parties, CPI(A) and CPI(M), the one that became bigger. We were, as students, kind of influenced by that, the presence of that. And then came the late 60s when there was the Maoist movement. The Naxalite movement began so the universities were occupied; students were being handed over to the police by

the Vice-Chancellors. The Vice-Chancellor of the university was killed in broad daylight in front of the library by some people who were very angry about the fact that he opened the residence of the university and handed people over to the police. There was a massive anti-Maoist, anti-M-L upsurge on the part of the state, which eventually led in '74, I think, or '75 was it, to the Emergency. This started in Assam and Bengal. So, colleges and universities were occupied and you couldn't really go through without going through army checkpoints and things like that. What I see now a little about Gaza and places like that. Some places in Bengal became like that. Literally, thous—

CTM: It wasn't exactly like that in Delhi but we had the same—

HB: Kind of ambience, yeah. And we had occupations. Universities were occupied by students and so on. And I was a very young faculty so you can imagine that there was a lot of excitement and debates and discussion and then the police coming in and rounding up faculty and students. It was a really terrible thing. Also the city was in a great turmoil and buses were burning. If you left at night, you know, in the evening, you didn't know if you'd come back. So I grew up through that and you know I was between the age of twenty to twenty-seven when I witnessed this upsurge. So that might be my main orientation, let's put it that way. And though we did not talk generally about women's movement at this point, there was a strong anti, anti-oppression, social justice, economic justice angle to all this. And it kind of inherited in some way the mantle of anti-colonials' fight over the last hundred years before then almost, of fighting against oppression, fighting against any kind of inequality and injustice. So it kind of became a continuation, if you like, of an incomplete revolution. Or a revolution that didn't happen in India.

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So, China went one way and India went another. And our communist parties became electoral. They gave up any kind of idea of extra-parliamentary armed struggle and so on. And we became kind of a, you know, aspiring bourgeois Third World capitalism. And within that the problems unfolded. So the notion of social justice was a big thing. And we saw so much disappointment by people. All people had waited for this Independence, right and when it happened, through the '47 to the '60s, it didn't deliver much. So, now of course it's grotesque. Then it was terribly disappointing. People coming from Bangladesh, or in those days East Pakistan, were not yet settled. The whole refugee question from this transfer of population was hanging in the air. And you've read Mahashweta and other people and you know about what happened through all that time. So, that was my orientation, but we did read in the course of all this material on justice for women because as you know there was a fair bit of participation of women in Indian Independence movements in the different groups beginning with armed terrorism to the more pacific Gandhian communists. A vast

number of women present in this. And this is discussed really well by Dharma Kumar's daughter, Radha Kumar. The book called *History of Doing*. And it's really a good book.

CTM: It's a really good book. I agree.

HB: Beginning to end. It begins in the 19th century and works out this politics first about women and then by women.

CTM: That's right. And has photographs, which I love.

HB: Beautiful photographs, the production of the bills, hand bills and so on. It's a very nice book. It's really worth having. We went through, I mean we are the inheritors of that. In the English department, reading people like Mary Wollstonecraft was a big thing. I mean we were students in the English department, reading the Victorian women novelists and so on, on the one hand, and on the other, even though it was truncated reading, things like reading Lenin on the women's question, because there was the women's question that was bedeviling all the communist movements at that time. Being part of that ambience—women, problems of women were not unknown to us. So I think that made me think that it wasn't really a parliament question, representation in the government question, but the women's question became a question of human question. Woman as human, woman as citizen, woman as worker, etc. took on that kind of proportion. So that is really my foundation and then one thing that I did not know and will talk about it later—should I continue?

LEC: Mm-hm.

CTM: Yeah, keep going.

HB: …was that very little connection I think we made between our personal lives and political lives from this point of view. We knew we had to be ethical, we knew we had to live austerely. We couldn't expect, you know, to live very rich and whatever lives. But we would have to be true to our words and not be exploiters and so on, and that we had to dedicatedly work for betterment and justice and so on. And actually people working even in the old Congress and nationalist movements, as well as the communist movements lived extremely below simple lives. People who never had more than a few hundred rupees to live on even if that, and never married, lived in other people's houses, moved constantly. I mean, so sacrifice and austerity were the two very key words. So we had that and we could actually try to live up to that. But we could not yet interpret so well, though we read Wollstonecraft, the connection between personal, family lives. We talked about justice and equality for our mothers and aunts and grandmothers, because we were also a generation that went to schools, universities.

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The Independence really brought a vast number of women to the higher education and work. And then refugee families had women working because now it was no longer possible to keep your daughter at home and get her married. She had to make an earning in order for the family to survive. Ritwik Ghatak in his film, *Cloud Cover* (*Meghe Dhaka Tara*), has this amazing girl, young woman who is going to office and looking for work. Her family, her sick father, you know, semi-literate mother—so, the role of girls changed in my childhood quite strongly. Suddenly from one being put on the shelf for the marriage market you knew that you'd have to make a living. Marry, yeah, but also make a living. Many men and women at that time couldn't marry for a long time because they had to raise their younger brothers and sisters. It's a very common story. Father can't work, mother cannot go to work because she doesn't even have the education and the older brothers and sisters who would work, they would raise the younger people, get everything done. And by the time their time came, they were forty or forty-five and they thought it's too late—what's the point?

CTM: To get married or anything. Makes sense, right? Familiar.

HB: So I think it's very familiar even in black families and Caribbean families.

LEC: Yeah. The oldest daughter…

HB: …is really the head of the family when parents cannot provide any more. So we got that part about the family and justice for women and equality and wanting to have a space in the educational world, not hang back from arguing and being part of politics but we didn't really think about sexual violence so much. We associated it with the Partition riots.

CTM: Right. Rapes and…

HB: Rapes. Those were themes. But the family life I think was still left to a large extent unexamined. So I think that that is something I learned here. That's the interesting thing, that it's not the other part of the street, the demonstrations, equality, etc. It was really learning more about the question of personal relations and how the personal is political. And that was really a meaningful slogan for us and I learned that here. But at the same time when I was learning it here, they were learning it in India. Right, I was going home—not through me, but you know there was a UN get together of women and various kinds of commissions were being set up. And very interestingly, a book became extremely important in India. Two books. One by Sheila Rowbotham. *Women's Consciousness, Man's World*. And the other was Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch*. The title was so shocking and the cover was of a woman's torso, hanging on some kind of hook. So you know people were doing that. It's interesting as you say that people who don't know each other and lived in

different parts of the world, something happened. And I've tried to think what did happen. It's only guesswork but around the late '60s and '70s there were a lot of social movements and anti-imperialist movements happening. Somehow, I don't know, maybe not causally but conjuncturally, there was a connection between these things. Vietnam was my upbringing in terms of feeling identified. There was a slogan, which said—you'll understand it in Bengali—it said, "Amar nam, tomar nam, Vietnam". "Nam" means name, so your name and my name is Vietnam. So these slogans and big marches and the bombings that happened and the My Lai massacre and things like that. I think this on one hand in anti-imperialist movements was very influenced and I remember that when we were in college the plays being done on Civil Rights Movements in the United States.

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And there was a very powerful film director and writer Utpal Dutto, who was part of the People's Theatre Association, writing plays about the Scottsboro Boys. And he did another one on Luther King. Then he got very excited by the Panther movement. So that I think had a really big impact. These things were traveling. And the name of Angela Davis that people knew even when I was in college. So, that was very important. South Africa was very important. And there were movements, you know Algeria had previously led. One after the other the countries were uprising. In the '70s and early '80s at this formal de-colonization was accomplished. So then I think that all this together gave suddenly here and elsewhere—and the American Indian Movement which they didn't know but I knew about here, still in prison. So, at that time I think there was a kind of hope. I would call it hope. An awareness of both the injustices on one hand and the possibilities of overthrowing, and really overthrowing. And we did remember having discussions about reform vs. revolution. Long discussions about reform and revolution. And Fanon who I learned to read here. You know people were quite scared of him because he so unashamedly talked about armed struggle. Last night I was telling them, that you know there's a difference. Violence is what the ruling oppressors do; armed struggle is what the resistors do. And I think it would be really difficult to really make both into the same. And what has happened now is that we have forgotten that Fanon talked about armed struggle, reclaiming of land and territories, and anti-colonialism, by any means necessary. But the fact is that he didn't say go out and just be violent.

CTM: It's what's happening in Palestine now that people refuse to actually analyze in that way in terms of resistance.

LEC: Because it's the state that is violent.

HB: The state has the monopoly.

LEC: The state has been perpetrating violence on people every day. But the resistance to the state, those are resistance movements.

HB: And they have the monopoly of violence. I mean right now what we are watching in the United States, you know. We are watching state violence. Now if people fight back and say there is no other way they will acknowledge your fight back. You have pleaded and said please and so on, nothing has worked. People are human, they really have rage, they have their need for dignity. I mean how long can people keep on and on without ever saying boo about this whole situation? So I think that that part really in the '70s created kind of, there was an atmosphere…

CTM: Yeah, like a space for certain kinds of revolutionary ideas, which included feminism.

HB: Yeah, which included saying you know women's lives are human lives and so on but also North America…I don't think Europe so much at that time, but England…English-speaking countries in the West had really more direct feminist movement and so I think Rowbotham has to be remembered in this context, and Greer. Then when I read here Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* it helped me a lot because personally I was going through the break-up of a marriage and I could understand the framework what was going on as better because it didn't seem like a fight between me and my husband alone, but a kind of a frame within which we were both stuck. You know, we parted but the reason I think we didn't part very horribly, I mean we remain friends to this day, is in some way I developed, and he too, some interpretive framework that two good people do not necessarily make a good couple.

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You know that there is no reason to shame and blame and I think it was helped by lack of property because there was nothing to fight about. *[Laughter]* So I think that's all this mixture of the personal and the political life. Politics was personal to me and then personal became political. It wasn't so clear, right, but it was exciting. I think we taught some of the first—by we, I mean a group of women through and with whom I went through many, many exploratory sessions about what they now call consciousness raising, about what I was up to, what they were up to, what sexuality was about, etc. Those things we did not learn in our younger days about political movements at all. So that was very important. So we had this church basement. For a bit we had meetings and then we got one floor of a house and it was called Women's Place. And there was really nothing here, you know. University of Toronto didn't have women's studies. Forget that, they didn't have Canadian studies, they didn't have Black studies, they didn't have nothing.

CTM: So what moment are we talking? '70s?

HB: We're talking about the '70s. Through the '70s. So then I taught, I remember, my first feminist course. It was on Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, I was telling you, English department. And talked about the body, female body as a metaphor. You know male's body had been talked about a lot but no one talked about childbirth, menstruation, you know female body, female desire and so on. So we, you know that was my first course and it became quite popular.

LEC: That was at York or UFT?

HB: No, no. In that women's place.

LEC: Oh in The Women's Place, yeah.

HB: We didn't have anything at UFT. Then in '74 I teamed up with this friend of mine, Howard Buchbinder, who left his US citizenship, and came here and ran a group called Praxis.

LEC: That was a wave of Vietnam rejecters who came over. So, many of us were taught by American professors. Radicals who came here.

HB: So these people who gave up their American citizenship and became very—this group was called Praxis and then they had a group called Just Society and so on. This gentleman and I created a course called Male-Female Relations and we co-taught it. We used all this available material. By the time the mid-70s and late 70s came along there was more and more material. As a literature student I was absolutely charmed, or whatever intoxicated by meeting Kate Millet—*Sexual Politics*. All these great English writers suddenly becoming, you know, terrible arts and patriarchs and misogynists. We knew there was something wrong with them but we didn't exactly have the words. So it was very good for that. Meanwhile, in the city…I don't know…you may have been very young then…if you were here…groups developed, like that Black Education Action Committee.

LEC: The Black Education Project.

HB: There was this Congress for African American—what was it called? Black Women's Congress. The bookstore, Third World Bookstore across from the Bathurst subway station with the Johnsons.

LEC: They were communists.

HB: They were former communists. And there was also now attempts to set up International Women's Day which was very contentious and we cut our teeth on various kinds of political dissonances with that. So, that was going on. Then in '73,

after the Chilean coup and the killing of Allende, a lot of Chileans came here, and that was also very interesting to see these kind of Chilean coffee clubs where music was being played which are revolutionary. We heard the music of Violetta Para and Victor Jara and people like that. Marcel D'Souza, who also came here.

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And so there was a lot of politics in this city. We who started writing a little bit of poetry got like ten-fifteen minutes at the end of everything to read our poems. So we did a lot of poems at that time and that's when Dionne started writing, Lilian started writing. I did some and Krishant, Clifton, Joseph. I mean suddenly from nothing there was us. It felt pretty…

CTM: Powerful!

LEC: Powerful, because it was putting people of color, immigrants' lives in the center. Even though she's right. It might be at the end of whatever event but it was there and then they all started putting out volumes, no matter how small, of their poetry.

HB: Well, you know this thing that at that time we had nowhere to publish, right? So Williams-Wallace had a little publishing concern where she brought out Dionne's *Primitive Offensive* and *Fore Day Mourning*. And Krishanta, this Sri Lankan friend of ours, called Krishanta Sribhagatanta, he hadn't set hours to work. After ten at night in some printing press he knew where his friends worked. Now he had a cleaning company called Domestic Bliss who used to go around cleaning people's kitchens and stoves, etc. Whatever money they garnered, a little bit of that and we contributed some, came to publishing these books. So, you know, Lilian's first publication…

LEC: Allen.

HB: Allen, her first publication was what? *Rhythm an' Hard Times* was through that, my *A Separate Sky*, etc. when it all came through that handset thing where we had to compose the page. So, suddenly you know we were there so to speak and it was very good.

LEC: And the works were quite popular amongst all the communities—activists and scholars.

HB: Yeah, people were not saying, "From here, from there. "There was just…

LEC: It was just…together.

CTM: There was a sense of camaraderie and collaboration.

HB: The word 'Black', as in England, became kind of to stand for resistance politics, right, from the global South as we call it now. So, you know, there was really very little of competition or going off to major presses and trying to side with them and so on. So, people kind of—and I remember when at first we began to look at material to teach with and we found very little Canadian material. Fireweed had started towards the mid-70s. So there was a little bit of material there but there was really no book, no anthology. So, *Between the Lines*, there is a left press here, told me to edit a book and I did and they didn't like it. They said that this is not, I have to have sixteen year olds in front of my mind's eye and so on and that my writers didn't know how to write. So, this was in the late '70s. So I went to see Mekeda Silvera—do you know of her?

LEC & **CTM:** Yeah.

HB: Well, Mekeda and Stephanie, her partner, Martin, had started a little press and it was called *Sister Vision*. So I said to them, do you want a selling book? Because once it was out we could have used it as a textbook. And this book had Dionne, who else did it have? It had Dionne, it had Lee Maracle, it had Roxanna Ng, it had Sherene Razack, it had my own writing, one piece in the intro and I forget—May Yee from the Chinese community. There were like eight or ten essays. Later most of these people became very well known writers. And these people at Between the Lines, which is supposed to be left—there were two brothers, the Swift brothers, who did work on oil in Indonesia and so on—we thought they were comrades but they were not and they were trying to tell me that I have to tell these people how to write properly, which I found very offensive. So she said yeah I want it and within three or four weeks we put the book out.

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CTM: What was it called?

HB: It was called *Returning the Gaze*. It was snapped up like that *[snaps fingers]* because it was one local material that we had. We'd been relying on U.S. and U.K. and it was good material but we didn't have something that addresses sexist racism or racist sexism, whichever way you want to call it. We had these first wave feminists writing which are women and women but it didn't really talk to certain particularities.

CTM: So, that's like a historic test.

LEC: I think you all put that piece by me and Dionne in there about the visible minorities.

HB: Yes, you. Visible Minorities.

CTM: Wow. So that must be one of your earlier pieces.

HB: That is probably one of your—the earliest piece. Mention me in your autobiography. *[Laughter]* Yeah. So we started this course Male-Female Relations in 1974, Howard and I. Howard Buchbinder was his name. He died some years ago. And still we had no women's studies courses, generally. And we didn't have any African American studies or Black studies or whatever you want to call it. Anti-racist Studies. These courses that we taught—one or two, I was a part-timer for many years, you know, about eighteen years or so. Raised a—my daughter was in MA class before I got a job. Proper job. But I worked a lot as part-time course directors. So we taught courses that had those components and then I devised a fourth year course on gender and race for Atkinson. This is a working people's school. Evening classes. But, also, around 1976 or so I think there was a course called Male & Female in Western Civilization that Johanna Stuckey, who was a well-known feminist at York, she and several other people brought it together. I was one of the TAs. There was a woman who later became a very good well-known writer on women & Hegel. A woman called Pat Mills. She wrote about nature and women and she worked with Bill Leach. She and I and a woman called Rusty Shteir, we had this course, which Pat said was a long leap from cave to couch. *[Laughter]* And it was. It began with the Babylonian genesis and it ended with Maya Angelou. In between, with Juliet Mitchell talking about psychoanalytical ways.

CTM: *[Laughs]* Oh god!

HB: So we all attended each other's lectures. It was nice because we didn't have this hierarchy, right. It was still sort of like women together and politics in the university kind of thing. But unfortunately as we matured and developed as feminist scholars and departments were starting to be shaped and so on, actually, that disappeared. The university absorbed a lot of it you know. Hierarchies began to appear. And being women was superseded by being faculty and being students. I feel personally that we took a lot from lives of ordinary people from the street and we never gave back to the women from whom we took and that really is what intellectuals typically do. So, in some sense you know now it's become so academicized that the politics is very much institutional politics and the publications are written you know in a language and so on that people can't, even educated ordinary people can't read them. And organizations that had a lot to do with women's groups and so on disappeared. The state started pulling back and the neoliberalism that you talk about, it began here. In these conditions of undoing, in the case of Canada, a welfare state into less and less and less politics every day.

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And funding of course was big. And actually none of the political parties took up even any really, in any real sense, any anti-racist feminism. You know it just remained the talk of glass ceiling. Trade unions talked a little bit about women's marginalization. And actually to this day expanded enough to include the new worker, which is this transient worker, the precarious worker. Trade unions remained really strongly tied, I mean I don't have to tell you that, you know that very well, that it just remained so tied to the formal labor, properly employed labor when majority of labor in this country is slowly not that labor at all. The face of worker is not the face of the other black or white worker who were in the Detroit auto-factories, Flint, Michigan and so on that Michael Moore talks about, I mean those are—now I think GM is coming back a bit, but it's changed. The number of people employed is so few. And certainly, women are not a part of it. So this is basically what brought me where I am. Life, really. Politics about women, involving women and all around women, etc. It became very apparent to us, many, many of us that, one, you know we can't really do social politics and not do issues around women. And we can't really also ignore—I think there has been a very important trend that I learned here: the whole psychological-personal-experiential dimension of women's lives and movements. So, what brought me here was that. And then going to India every year almost and seeing women there develop their work and then being asked by Jashodhara Bagchi, now late, deceased, she wanted to start a school of women's studies. So she and I did a project together. We got a lot of money, which we used in order to set up that place and we bought our computer, our first phones and this and that and the university allowed us to house it there. So she was the director and she marshaled all of us into her service. She had a great ability to bring everybody together. So we did something called social roots of culture. Many of us worked on 19th century and the rise of the gentlewoman, that bhadramahila. So these became our books eventually. Inventing subjects and that book I did and she did on motherhood. And Kavita Panjabi and people like that were still students.

CTM: Yeah, I know, at Cornell. That's how I knew her.

HB: She was there and then they came back. It was a lovely place. We had lots of food and chatted and sat around. It was a great adda place to go and sit there and chat with each other. So I think that place also has become now—there is a lot more money but also become kind of cold and distant and no adda anymore hangout, you know. Business is being done there. So in some ways—.

LEC: Same in the North, same in the South.

HB: Yeah, so it's really become more and more and more institutionalized and of course it's gone the direction the university has gone. And at York, too. So many of us didn't put our teaching in women's studies because we thought now this lets the departments off the hook. As students were saying, you know you want to do

something on women you just go—they say go to the women's studies, we don't want to go to the ghetto, we want to be here—

LEC: Wow, wow.

HB: …and be able to do work on these things here. So sociology was becoming really Marx, Weber, Durkheim, the fathers of sociology. The mothers were not at all involved.

CTM: No, right.

HB: And anything you wanted to do on gender and patriarchy and all that. Well, you could do it in development studies as political economy but really all kinds of people working on politics, ideology, development, you know, those kinds of things had to go to women's studies.

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So, some of us thought we are going to be right here, doing this work in this department because if we all leave then we just leave it to them. So, I think that was a good thing. So, many of my younger colleagues do work but I do think it's become unfashionable to talk about patriarchy anymore.

CTM: Yes. Isn't that amazing?

HB: Yes, though it's full-fledged. Beating up and raping and all kinds of things are going on unabated but it's become unfashionable to talk about these grand narratives. So you know it's an ultra-liberalism of you can be who you want to be, you know, this or that, so on. I think that edge that was there, something that gave you something to fight about and with has really yielded to the ultra-liberalism, which in the name of flexibility has actually made it difficult—

CTM: Has de-politicized—

HB: De-politicized and make a judgment about what is right and what is wrong. In fact, it's not right to be making a judgment. No one can because there is one thing that they are certain about is that everything is uncertain. So—.

LEC: But I think some of that, you know, has to do with the fact that the state has an agenda so many have kind of given into, you know, Himani. So you look at what the state's role has been even in regularization of certain kinds of discourses, thinking and even inside the academy. So you find the scholars you know kind of withdrawing and retreating, making the decision not to teach these things.

HB: Probably.

LEC: Yeah, because some of us still do that kind of work. We're still teaching it. And initially it seems foreign to students and then pretty soon they understand because you really tie it to their lived realities so they can see how they are being oppressed. And I think when we fail to do that we are no longer good feminists or good whatever they thought of themselves before. But to do this is not—I mean, to give into the state's agenda like that has to be acknowledged that this is—I mean it's like being complicit in your own subordination, no?

CTM: Yeah.

HB: Mm-hm. Sure.

CTM: Do you need a break? I'm shifting us a little bit. So, if you were you think about what it is that we need within the feminist, anti-racist, Marxist, whatever social movements that we care about right now, right, which are also what seem to be the movements that will give us…make it possible for us to imagine what it means to not be complicit in the neoliberal agenda, etc. right—what do we need to do to create sort of solidarities, connections and so on across the divides that are completely in place at the moment? As you say, the neoliberal narrative of everything is uncertain, so we can't even make certain kinds of judgments, which we have in common, actually. That if we were to hear each other speak we would know we are making the same analysis and judgments. And therefore, we would have things that we can fight about, fight with, you know.

LEC: And I think part of that question is what I was saying. What brought people to the point, what brought these activists and scholars to the point of deciding they're not going to do this kind of work? Because that's what happened. Nobody held a gun to their heads. They have given into this neoliberal agenda that says this is those radical Marxist, you know Marxism is not cool anymore. It's not even not cool, it's not relevant.

[Laughter]

CTM: No, it's not relevant, that's true.

HB: Yeah, its time has ended.

LEC: Its time has ended.

CTM: So, patriarchy is not fashionable and Marxism is not relevant.

LEC: And so that's really the crux of the question. What needs to happen to turn those things around?

HB: Well you know none of us have any crystal ball. None of us can come up with a really definitive solution. If that could be possible that would be wonderful but in small ways you know the little that one can do, I think there are a few things that—you're right, no one took a gun to our heads and said do this, you know.

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But I think there is a kind of—that's where we have to realize that it's not causality but it's environmental. So the development of an environment of anti social-justice projects that basically perverted demand for social justice into contained and managed administrative ruling relations. You know, that, I think is a problem because we wanted everything and we got this really perverted little contained space within which to do our little things. We wanted a holistic politics and we got a little stall in the vending booths of the academic world and this is our little stall where our books are being sold and we also have our place. So in a way I think in the beginning we might have thought that it's too tight or too totalistic to want something so big, we need to include more and more. And the more we included, the more we got excluded until some of us became quite marginal in our own political world. And I think again it's not causal but a few things that came into a constellation together. And I think it happened around the '90s. Mid-90s on, particularly. And I think one of the things, though we never really relied on the ' Union but the defeat of Soviet Union, essentially disappearance of an empire if you like, also gave a very triumphalist rhetoric to capitalism. And all we could get was you know the best we could get was liberalism. And that seemed to be the open thing, it was the end of ideology, it was the end of history, it was socialism on the trashcans or trash heaps. So all these kinds of things became really very, very important to discourage people for a while. Because I think we are still living in a moment, not that Soviet Union was our, I mean certainly not mine and anybody coming from Third World politics, like CPI(M) had nothing to do with Moscow. I mean if anybody disappointed us it was China, by turning towards this really also neoliberalist communism, and which killed the communism in West Bengal. After thirty-three years, we lost in the election. Over land that the government was taking to give practically for free to the industries. So we got disappointed and that was part of the triumphalist moment. But also, I think something happened and I'm not quite sure how to trace its trajectory but I was trying to write an article on ideology; history of it, pure and simple, in a dictionary kind of way. And I found that almost all writing on ideology—even if it was wooden kind of ruling ideas of any age or ideas of the ruling class kind of slogan discussion—disappeared. In its place came something called cultural studies. And the turn was made from Gramsci's notion of hegemony, which was totally appropriated without looking at the moment of contradictions and force, to simply just some kind of

administered ideological device. So, I think that one of the books I saw in that time was the book by Laclau and Mouffe on socialist strategy. And I noticed that class struggle understood in a very wide sense was excluded. And social movement went this way and class movement on the other side. And I think now if we could bring them back together…open up the boundaries of class, you know my own childhood's dilemma, that when you are doing class can you do experience of being a woman, can you do experience and also do class? Obviously we had to socialize the concept of class but we all also have to materialize it, historicize the concept of culture. And this is easier said than done.

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Anyone can say it right now, here I am. But how do you do it? How do you create social movements that have a double edge like that? Which doesn't have to do everything at once but orients it in a different way and doesn't say you know—suddenly all writing on ideology and politics ceased and in fact culture became an alibi for becoming non-political. And what was once missing in the economism now has become culturalism.

CTM: That's brilliant. That's completely true. Right?

HB: So what we need to do I think in our teaching if we have nowhere else—every year a lot of people go through our hands. I mean more than a political party's hands…

[Laughter]

HB: We have access to young minds in a way that other people don't. But to relate, as Linda said, the experience of my students with what they know with what we are teaching is really the key to this. Because I taught a course in development studies in the summer. Believe me, these women—who were like bus drivers and Loblaws workers, etc., they're taking degrees in the summer—knew right away how capitalism works. They knew primitive accumulation back to front because their families had to be turfed out of Jamaica and land was completely taken away. Well — I didn't have to tell students that they destroyed all that milk industry dairy in Jamaica. Because one student told me she saw milk going down the drain because she was coming back from school she saw milk in the drain. And told her mother, and her mother and everybody came to see milk in the drain. And they couldn't even rescue the milk because it was mixed in the drain.

LEC: Yeah because Nestle had brought milk powder to Jamaica—

HB: And then I showed them that film called *Life and Debt*.

CTM: *Life and Debt*, which is fabulous.

LEC: This is the key. We have to tie people's lived realities and experiences to these theories so they can understand that they made them and that's where I think academics are failing.

HB: Yeah, because you know they really don't have any social relationship with the people of that class and background. They don't hang out with them, they don't really care what people living in, you know, high rise suburbs here, which are actually slum suburbs. They have nobody, they have no relationship with anybody, they don't know people like that. Half of my colleagues wear clothes from Prada and even if they buy it from Winner's.

LEC: Absolutely, they're products from Winner's, still Prada from Winner's.

HB: But you know the clothes that people wear now to teach are really corporate power clothes. I can't imagine, you know, you can wear things like that.

LEC: But they don't see a connection between that and what they are teaching.

HB: No, they don't.

LEC: And the separation between them and the class of the people they are teaching.

HB: They don't. This is the thing. I had a class full of people who had children, very young people and they said, "We were bad when we were little." You know, got pregnant at fifteen years, a couple of kids, living with mother and it was really stunning, you know, they are working in three jobs, they are Loblaws workers and so on and looking after children and going to school.

CTM: We're running out? We've run out? We have? Ok. Fabulous!

LEC: Thank you, Himani.

CTM: Thank you, that was 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.