Linda Martín Alcoff

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LEC: So it's June 6th and we are today having a discussion with Linda Alcoff, a former colleague of ours at Syracuse University, who has now been liberated.

CTM: Yes! Yeah, and who we've known for a long time, I've known for a long time, since FMS, which was—

LMA: Almost 20 years.

CTM: Almost twenty years, right? So Linda is one of our colleagues who has walked the journey. There are so many people that we're talking to we've realized we have had this history with; individually and also together. So anyway, thanks for doing this.

LEC: So we wanted to…start the discussion by having you tell us about what brought you to feminism and to feminist work and feminist activist work specifically, and shaped your scholarship as well.

CTM: At any level, whatever story you feel like telling at the moment; personal, political, intellectual.

LMA: Well you know, I think the women in my family, the stories that they told about their lives and the difficulties of their lives. My mother had a particularly difficult life and the situation of women both in the United States and in Panama…half my family is in Panama and half in the United States…but there are some similarities in women's lives in terms of violence and economic constraints and just you know, severe…not being able to really…support themselves on what they could make and hardship. So I think, you know, my mother used to tell me secretly when I was growing up, you can do anything you want. She was sort of instilling a certain kind of feminism in me because she wanted me to go to college. She'd been able to go to college, which was something of a miracle. And she wanted me to have my own job, go to college, be

able to support myself and children if I had them and not be dependent, you know, on anybody. She had experienced domestic violence and when I was really lost, she told me that one time she was in Panama and she was going to walk into the ocean with me and my sister. Just walk into the ocean and come out. My sister was four years older than me, so I was probably two. And so my sister was six, but something stopped my mother. And she came back out. So I always knew that there were problems in the world because I grew up sort of hearing about these things from an early age.

CTM: Were you in Panama at that time?

LMA: I left Panama when I was three years old but I had contact with my aunts who were very strong women. My aunt Ida in particular was very forceful. My two aunts married late and they had their own lives in a way, you know even though it was difficult to do that under the conditions of Panama. They were both teachers in high school. So I had certain role models of strong women. They didn't use terms like feminism and they didn't think you could change the world but they were non-fatalistic about their own lives. They weren't fatalistic that you just have to accept violence or you just have to accept a cloistered life. They found ways to, you know, have their lives to some extent, so that was a great model.

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But they didn't think about changing the world and changing man and changing society because, that was I think just beyond their horizon. They didn't see that. My grandmother, too, my white grandmother on my mother's side also…you know she had a second grade education, she had a rough life but she did what she wanted to do. She was really bad at housework. She did a lot of work outside. She'd grow flowers and they didn't have enough money to like money to grow flowers but she did things that she wanted to do. And that was a model. You know, despite all she kind of lived her own way- in certain ways. So it wasn't until I was a teenager that you know women's liberation began to emerge and feminism began to emerge and I began to read about it and think about it and I was…I was ready. I was kind of primed you know, for it but…you know I think Gloria Steinem was the first one that I ever … in the news in my small town in Florida where I grew up. It was interesting. And then I became a radical and heard all the criticisms of her but when I was fifteen, finding out about her kind of like…"Oh!"…'cause there was a sense of a collective possibility. But then I went to college and became…got involved in organized activities and organized women's liberation movement as we called it back then.

CTM: And what was that like?

LMA: Well, I was at Florida State and that's where Dorothy Allison went. It's in Tallahassee, Florida. The first one, the first feminist women's health centers were

started there. We had a feminist women's bookstore. There was a women's center on the campus when I got to campus by 1973. So there was actually a place where there was already feminist community and activity and I got involved. I went to consciousness raising sessions which totally intimidated me and became, you know, active in the women's center. I was organizing more sort of against what we called bourgeois feminism, in those days which was liberal feminism. I think bourgeois feminism was liberal feminism?

CTM: Yeah.

LMA: So, I would bring people to campus who had "Women's Liberation**:** A Communist View".

[Laughter]

CTM: Wow.

LMA: And you know both the CP and then some more ML. Marxist-Leninists variants who were more to the Left of the Communist Party USA. The movement that I was involved in was struggling around these issues…there was a recognition of the importance of gender and race, alongside class but…and there was a lot of female leadership. There was a lot of female leadership but it wasn't all white. But that doesn't mean that people understood theoretically the importance of gender and race vis-a-vis class. There was still a little bit of a…

CTM: Class first—

LMA: Yeah. And there was some open homophobia even though in the feminist community there was, you know lots of anti-homophobia and lesbian presence but then over in the Marxist feminist community there was—this was in '73-74-75—they didn't get it. So that was going on. That was all very interesting for me to see. I ended up dropping out of college to join the movement. My senior year I was studying, I put myself through college, you know.

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I was financially on my own from the age of sixteen and that was a big feminist lesson because the kinds of jobs I could get—I got a job as a curb girl at Frisch's Big Boy and they made me wear an outfit that kind of looked like Flash Gordon's girlfriend and I would have to wear this outfit to go out to the trucks because I was the curb girl. And the guys in the trucks—you know they're working guys—they need a little diversion, I get that but, nobody hears what they say to you. So I had—I waitressed, I did every kind of job and sexual harassment was just like the order of the day. We didn't—It was just like, you just put up with it. I had to quit jobs

sometimes because you had to like—so I had this experiential understanding of how messed up stuff was and then I had this attempt to develop a political thinking and practice around it that would bring everything together, but of course we were not quite clear on how to do that. But we organized—I participated and organized in Campus Workers and Nursing Home Workers outside Tallahassee and the—sort of clan type management sicced these union thugs on us. It was a union but it was controlled by these clan types. So they came at us threatening to beat us up. It was just craziness. Although it still goes on, it's not like that's over. But in Tallahassee, Florida there were no union rights. Nursing home workers were, you know—I remember going to school with people who had to, you know, get out of—I went to college, with people who had to work on plantations and get out of school at noon, from their public schools, during the harvest season. This was part of the rural south that was still plantation economy. That wasn't just about the economic, that was also about the social relations, the police force. So in a way it was very easy to realize that you had to think about all these things together. Bourgeois feminism, you know, didn't really have much of a purchase in that space—for me, or for—you know, it was just in the movement—because there were a lot of challenges. The kids at Florida State weren't looking to work on Wall Street.

[Laughter]

CTM: Right, right. Yeah, so interesting no when you think about what happens given where you go to school, you know—what would have happened if you were in an Ivy League situation Vs. where you were. It's interesting. And then what happened? So you dropped out and—

LMA: The Vietnam War was still happening. So there was an anti-war student movement and that movement was lead by charismatic, good-looking men. Not all white men but charismatic, good-looking men.

CTM: Yeah, that's key.

LEC: And if they a little bit left—

LMA: They were like the cult leaders. Really you'd go to these meetings and everybody would be…and they had you know these girlfriends—the gender politics was you know, just ridiculous. They had these gorgeous girlfriends who didn't speak.

[Laughter]

CTM: Not supposed to—

LMA: Yeah and so I was not going to fit into that kind of thing. I was always moving back and forth between the feminist spaces and the Left—

CTM: Were there men in these feminist spaces at all at that time?

LMA: No, I would say not at all none, at that time.

CTM: Makes sense.

LMA: It was…there were a lot of lesbians in Tallahassee…women, variety but not men. But there were men on the Left who espoused and some of them followed it up with practice and some didn't.

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But the particular anti-war groups were, you know lead by…had a particular way. I got involved in this thing on campus called Center for Participant Education, which was a free university; I was on the board and worked in the office and everything. We provided about sixty free classes every quarter by pairing people in the community who had skills and just made it available—on everything from art to practical skills to Marxism Leninism Mao Zedong Thought. And we had film series and we did all kinds of stuff on the campus. When I first got on the board, I was invited—I got to the office and they gave me office work to do and I did it because I was really happy to be there and in that space, but you know—I wasn't going to be satisfied with doing the office work while other people made the decisions on who we invited and stuff.

CTM: So what then, okay, so what because we have so much because there's too many things we can ask you now, based even on that little… the story. So then, what brings you to feminist philosophy and the kind of work you end up doing?

LMA: The first paper I wrote for a philosophy class—I was a physics major—so many physics majors—

CTM: End up in philosophy?

LMA: Yeah. Charles Mills

CTM: Charles Mills did that?

LMA: He taught physics in Jamaica before.

LEC: They got the spelling wrong, you know they both begin with 'ph'.

[Laughter]

LMA: But the first—we read Hannah Arendt, "The Human Condition" and she had this analysis—this category of work and then the category of labor—and it's from the

ancient Greeks. The category of work is creative, it's where you're making new things, it's what human beings do as opposed to animals. The category of labor is just sustenance. It's just what you do to live, so it's more animal like. So in her view, labor really counts for nothing. It's all about work. And labor is you know, valuable to the extent it makes work possible. She does value work but she doesn't value labor. So I argued in this paper that she had it backasswards, because labor was more important than work, because nothing can happen without labor. So I began to realize that the way we categorize and conceptualize the world really makes a difference in what we value and how we view others' contributions. And then, you know I began to think about…well, is labor really mindless repetition or does it actually include conscious intentionality.

LEC: Its piece of hard work, because labor, without labor, nothing can happen.

CTM: Right.

LEC: So then, philosophy got you to understanding that distinction.

CTM: The category, that categories matter

LMA: And the work that, the labor that women do is just off the map of philosophy, in terms of understanding what it really requires intellectually, emotionally, physically and then everywhere and what it actually contributes to the economy and the society, so I thought philosophy was a place in which you could just do some correction, some intervention, boy was I wrong but?

[Laughter]

CTM: You were not Linda!

LMA: I was not, but on the other hand I didn't realize at that time how difficult it was going to be and that's partly why I quit, because two of my favorite activist professors lost their jobs, because of their activism and so I just thought the academy was hopeless; but feminism, I mean, I was, you know, mostly situated I think on the Left, with always this feminist identity, but sometimes I remember I used to have to justify, you know are you a bourgeois feminist? You know, I had to explain myself.

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CTM: Right.

LMA: But I was part of the Left and got involved in the organized left pretty early on and I saw feminism as a part of that. I never was active in a feminism that was woman-only or woman-dominant—and the particular group that I chose to join—

which I don't want to say—I'll tell you guys—I joined because our regional leader was an African-American woman. Our larger regional leader was a woman, a Jewish woman. It took gender and race very seriously. It was not a Trotskyist group. It was very critical of the Trotskies, because they always, you know thought…well, after the revolution there was that stuff. The part of the Left that I was attracted to was the part of the Left that was trying to say these had to be integrated. So I was feminist in the Left.

CTM: In the Left, right, right. So in terms of your—if you think about the work you've done now, you know over the years…activist, theoretical, philosophical, political, in movements, etc. Talk a little bit about what you've observed has been the effect of some of that among communities of—anybody—of women, of students, organizers. And even maybe, what you hope some of the impact has been of your own work.

LMA: We don't think in those terms—

CTM: No, we don't, that's why we're asking this question.

LEC: Well, we kind of…because we women on the Left recognize what was missing in the Left about us as women.

CTM & **LMA:** Yeah.

LMA: You know I think, I did force the issue, but I have trouble like sort of owning this. Because it was always about the group, you know, it was the collective.

LEC: Well, in your imaginary then. Think about it as imaginary…what the impact could have been. So it's takes you, yourself out of it somewhat. And look at it as the effect of the work.

LMA: Yeah, I think there was a struggle around the personal and the political, you know. There was the line about supporting gender, women's liberation, gender equality. Then there was a set of personal politics and there was—I was struggling because I was a young mother, you know by this point, to—how do you negotiate, you know, between the ideals of the great revolutionary ascetic who gives up everything and has no life and leaves, you know their children to be raised by wolves. *[Laughter]* And that's the right thing to do. Because you know it was very difficult to be a woman in the revolution. Still is. Because if you do call attention to the needs of reproduction you get criticized as soft or individualist or—so I pushed around that and then—I don't know—one of the things that I did participate a lot in for many, many years—and this took me to FMS—is work between people of different backgrounds. So, I think the various struggles we had—we had a brilliant union struggle in one—largest unionized female sewing factory in the world at the time outside of Atlanta, where I worked for a while.

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And we—I helped to bridge you know, so we brought women of different races together to struggle on the streets and be around solidarity. When a young Filipino was—they tried to get rid of her because she was too active, we got everybody together to fight for her and she won her job back. And I think of struggles like that…they're small they're local. There's nothing, you know—no national news but all these kinds of struggles that I was involved in over years and years and years, people remember. You know, people, I think, remember moments of struggle and moments of success and moments of coalition, experience that they had, even if they never have it again. They remember the moments when the walls broke down, when people did support each other. And if you can actually win something, even if it's a small thing, like one person's job back, it reinforces the message. So I think that's sort of been my—one of the things—

CTM: What about in the academy

LMA: Well, in the academy, I feel like I've had a longer period of activism. I ended up going back to school just deciding to try it again. And—the voice of people like me was—I mean it was so small that one person wouldn't make a difference. You know, we were starting to push for Latin American philosophy. I taught a feminist philosophy class, the first one—taught at Brown, where I went to grad school, and I got the philosophy department to accept it as a legitimate area. It took a while longer before we could get Latin American philosophy on the books. But, to get it in the curriculum—these kinds of courses. I just taught the first graduate seminar in the philosophy department here at the Graduate Center at CUNY on Critical Philosophy of Race that's ever been taught. I team taught it with my colleague, Frank Kirkland.

LEC: 2015.

CTM: 2015.

LMA: And the philosophy department chair said, "Oh, I don't know if enough students would be interested in it". We had a roomful. So, it's still the same work as before. To show that there is philosophical work to be done and that things like African American philosophy are not just—

CTM: A subset of philosophy.

LMA: Well, that they're not only relevant to African-Americans. African-American philosophy is normative political theory. It's normative ethics. It's history of philosophy. It's relevant to the whole. And we're doing that with Latin American philosophy now. We're bringing out volumes and teaching courses and having syllabi and agitating within the American Philosophical Association to recognize the area. Much of Latin American philosophy, the reason I'm interested in is it's decolonial.

It's been decolonial, you know, had elements of it. You can certainly see colonialism playing itself out in the tradition but you can also see a lot of conscious articulations of the effects of coloniality, on polity, on nation-states, on…even subject formation, on culture and on ideas. So it's a much more sophisticated and mature discussion about the relationship between culture and ideas than we have in North America. They're two hundred years ahead of us. Because they've been talking about this for two hundred years. We're just now beginning to think about, "Oh, do philosophical ideas actually have a connection to their time and place?"…and the kind of people who espouse them. How do we think about that? Well, they've been doing it, so that's my interest in Latin America. Not just because it's a geographical region that has been ignored and treated as if it doesn't have any philosophical originality, you know original work to it, but because it would actually change, you know be an intervention—

CTM: North American philosophy.

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LMA: And I, you know, I have had some impact in my work and in publications and in the institutional work. I've done a lot of institutional work.

CTM: I remember *[laughter]* some of that.

LMA: Yeah.

LEC: The work that women do or the reproductive work is important work. Would you say even when it became "cool" or understandable that reproductive labor is part of social labor, yeah, so that they would say, you remember when that shift happened and so much emphasis in the Left was like, yeah reproduction is part of social production, yeah, so we have to recognize it now. So, that was said, was it done? It is a real question, so…

LMA: Yeah, no.

[Laughter]

LEC: It wasn't done. So, it was written about by some of the guys on the Left. A lot of them would write that stuff, include it and say, just in passing, but it was a recognition that yeah, you know, reproduction is part of social production. Not just having babies, but all of the social implications of housework, reproductive labor, taking care of children so, became kind of cool, so they would say, not when I was baby-sitting my children you know…I have to leave because I have to go and pick up my kids. But it never really kind of flowed down into their actual practice. It was just,

like, theoretically talked about. So I'm thinking—the reason I'm asking is I'm thinking, what happened with people like yourself in the Left who work so much with those people? Did you hear that, did you see that actually happening? Was there a change taking place that—I mean the fact that some of it, you know made you think where you want to take your own work, your own scholarship? Was that because it wasn't happening or because you couldn't get them to acknowledge more of how important it was. You know what I mean? That was always a struggle on the Left, for women on the Left.

LMA: Yeah. I felt very alienated from those kind of men. I mean, I never…I think my view on the academy was that I was just going to survive. I didn't see myself as changing the culture of the academy because we were too marginal you know—

LEC: That was my question—

LMA: To changing that culture of it. But it's an ongoing fight on the Left and all the various trends of the Left. I think it's an absolutely ongoing struggle. In some ways it hasn't changed that much, you know despite all of our efforts in terms of the personal and political split and the cultish male leaders, I mean in terms of who we read and also in terms of local, sort of, charismatic leaders. So I don't think there has been a huge amount of progress on that front. Although I think—I think—well, there's been some progress but—

LEC: Why do you think not more? What do you think the underlying problems are? Because there are so many of us who talk about this still, and say, jeez it's 2015. We're talking like, okay from the '70s until now. What is it the Left doesn't recognize? Well, we see it's kind of broken down because of lack of some of that recognition but what is it that prevents that happening? I mean, they're so anti-neoliberalism. They see and understand all the problems of neoliberalism. What is it that they don't see about gender?

LMA: I think it's still sidelined. I think that the tendency of class reductionism is really strong today. Very strong. It has new theoretical formulations that dress it up in ways that mystify it to people. But it's still basically class—and I think it's class but I don't think class can be separated from these other—

LEC: Yeah. Race and gender and all the others.

LMA: But they do. They do, because they still think that there is an abstract worker, a precarious worker now, a new language of precarity, which is de-gendered and de-raced.

CTM: Absolutely.

LMA: So I think class reductionism has re-emerged in a new guise with the same effects of rendering—not only is gender and race sidelined, it's a problem.

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CTM: Yeah, it is.

LMA: It is a problem because if you talk about it you're an essentialist.

CTM: Exactly, you're an essentialist or you're personalizing stuff that—is not what you do. You theorize, you don't personalize. So that gets pitted…

LEC: But isn't that…okay so one last thing that really interests me about this, Linda, in terms of your work and what you do…do you see a connection between that and the reduction of labor organizing in this country?

CTM: Oh the reductionism?

LEC: No. How labor, how unionization has been reduced in America.

LMA: Well, that's an interesting question. 'Cause I've been involved, you know, in the labor movement for a very long time and I've sort of seen it, you know, day-to-day, right and the assault on labor in the United States has been—

LEC: Amazing.

LMA: Unbelievably effective, at the state level and at the ideological level. Though the state level is really important, because the labor law, I mean it really makes a huge difference. If you have four months from the time cards get signed to the time when you can have an election. Because in that four months, the main leaders can get their shifts changed to midnight, get fired, just a movement within a particular shop can get decimated. So the state law makes a huge difference. And people like Bill Clinton, of course…I mean the Democrats are never popular since they have instituted these state laws that dismantle the possibility. So we're probably going to an open shop and everything in the United States. That's what people in the union say now. It used to be a few places in the south. it's probably gonna be nationwide now.

CTM: What does that mean? What's the implication?

LMA: It means that if you work in a factory or a hospital and you don't want to belong to the union, you don't have to belong to the union.

LEC: You don't have to.

LMA: You don't have to pay, even though when the union negotiates a contract, you are—

CTM: You're benefitting from it.

LEC: But you don't have to pay dues.

LMA: You don't have to pay dues and so—it's very expensive, you know, labor unions. What they do is they will have ten very expensive campaigns for one that wins. And you don't get dues during—so unions are very—

LEC: That's why she's saying the state law is so important. Because it can break the union, and its been effective.

LMA: And the most expensive part of union work is the organizing work. Some unions have moved away from organizing, you know for a variety of reasons. For some it's economic, because locals—it's very expensive. You're talking two years, lots of staff, they have to have resources with no dues coming in. So you have dues from other sectors paying for the organizing effort. Sometimes the other sectors, they don't want to spend money on the organizing of the unorganized because they want the local to take care of their needs, which is understandable under conditions of scarcity. So organizing is extremely difficult. At the ideological level, of course, the individualism and the assault on unions, and you know there is an assault on unions from the state, from neoliberals, from the right. There's also an assault on unions from the Left. There's lots of I think, bad information and the academy has played a very bad role.

LEC: Serious role.

LMA: And I think that you have a bunch of academics who've never organized anything in their lives.

CTM: Theorizing about something.

LMA: Exactly. Exactly. And they have no clue. They have certain dogmatisms about grassroots and bottom-up. Sometimes, you know, it's more complicated than that. I don't know as well in the sector of the social sciences that you know you're in, I know more about the humanities. 'Cause English departments are full of these Marxists who are sometimes are not very helpful in real world struggles.

CTM: No, no. Right, right.

LMA: It's very interesting as you do labor work in the academy and you find out people who may be, you know feminists, who may be good on certain questions and—

LEC: Anti-labor.

LMA: —who won't support the union for the adjuncts. They won't support the union for the graduate students.

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CTM: Right, right.

LEC: Mm-hmm. We have that at SU.

CTM: Are there any feminist unions?

LMA: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. I think there's a lot of feminism in unions. And one of the things I've been saying as often as I can is that we have to rethink our understanding of where feminism is. 'Cause we think of feminism as a female only or female majority organization that's agitating around reproductive rights or specific gender related issues. The labor movement is full of feminists and it's full of feminist leadership. The pay scale of teachers and of nurses has changed astronomically in our lifetime because—and this required getting women organizers, women leadership. It also required re-conceptualizing the work. You know? What does it mean to be a teacher and what does it mean to be a nurse? And how much intellectual skills and how much risk-taking, how much education—you know, what is the value of the work? What is the requirement of the work?

CTM: Right.

LEC: And it's feminists in unions who got unions to understand that the average worker in the United States for years now, was no longer a blue collar white male, but it's a woman of color. And that came from some of that feminist leadership.

LMA: So there is organizing despite the…and that's what unions have figured out, rather than going shop by shop they're trying to figure out other ways of organizing to challenge the ideology, to change the terms of debate and how optimistic people feel about the possibilities.

LEC: And some of us have been saying that for so long now, because capital travels. It's always mobile and so it can pick up and close the shop here and go to Bangladesh. Labor can't do that. But what we need to do is figure out how to organize across all kinds of borders. So when the Gap happened maybe 15 years ago, when the Gap was—a whole bunch of these corporations here with their headquarters in New York, had workers in Sri Lanka organized because they wanted five rupees more. Five rupees more in their wages, not even per hour—per week. And they were not giving it. And it was the Gap and some others here—the Gap was the primary

one. And they just managed to contact their counterparts here in the United States and they joined them. So this was the first example of labor really moving across borders, international boundaries. You have to recognize, capital has been doing it for a long time. They pick up and they go and they close down the factory here. And they got it because they found out the shirts they were making were being sold for $150. Each. And all they wanted was five rupees. So these workers here said that they would shut down if they—

CTM: Right. Okay, we're shifting now. We're shifting a little bit, because we should move towards some of our end questions, questions in the end, okay. So, what do you see as some ways for feminists to actually come together across all these divides that right now we experience, in some cases, more acutely, because of neoliberalism and because of ideologies that, you know, are essentially seen as common sensical, even, sometimes—neoliberal ideologies? So, what would you say would be some ways that feminists can actually envision and enact solidarity right now?

LMA: Well, I think because capital is transnational some of the most important emerging movements are transnational. Like against particular companies. Sodexo, Aramark and Compass that are huge profit—billions of profit making—

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They provide everything from the food in prisons in the Unites States, the food in cafeterias of public schools—bus drivers, they sub-contract in the United States as well as food for, you know in similar kinds of institutional spaces and other parts of the world. And they pay people very differently, even though they pay terrible in the United States also. But by finding out exactly how much people are getting paid differentially by the same company and when that company is making billions of dollars of profit, so that creates opportunities. In some cases—I know some other instances where there's been a strike in one country and a sympathy strike—like a one day or something like that—a sympathy strike in other countries to show the company that—

CTM: There is awareness of what's going on.

LMA: Hmm. They can't get away thinking that they're going to keep siloed. I think feminists have been involved in some of this, but there needs to be more. And I like this model much better than the model of let's do something in the United States about our consumerized practices to help those poor Cambodian women seamstresses. Because that's a model of missionary work. It falls into missionary work. So I think there needs to be a model of common struggle for people who are positioned in some similar ways, vis-a-vis multi-national capital, that can give rise to a better model of feminist activism. And you could still get support from people who

are not seamstresses. Some unions are developing…you can be an auxiliary member, so you can join the union. This is very new, but you can join the union even if you're not a worker or an employee at a particular site, and pay dues and provide support. So you can, you know assist but it's not the missionary model where you're setting up an organization in the global center to help. So those kinds of like, you know, nonhierarchical models of solidarity of cause. I think the other domain I was thinking about I've done some work on is in regard to sexual violence, which is a global phenomenon. The phenomena is the attention that's paid to it in Delhi and Cairo and Paris and London and New York. And women are noticing what is happening in these other sites. And feminist organizations are noticing and getting ideas that are spread through social media, so there is a kind of, I've kind of written about this global echoing across these different sites…of strategies and language and also just spirit to go public and fight back and organize. And so, there's this kind of reverberating discussion and activism in regard to sexual violence. It reverberates between institutions, I think, like between the Catholic Church and the BBC and the military, you know and the, actually the Hasidic communities in Brooklyn. I think there is a reverberation of an understanding that these institutions that are so closed, that it doesn't work for vulnerable parties within it. But there's also a reverberation across countries. The challenge is going to be, I think the language that gets used, because sometimes the same word can mean different things in different locations. Like the term 'victim', it can signify differently. So it's not that, so we need to stay sort of de-centralized and local. I don't know if I'm being too abstract but you can sort of feel this in the coverage about sexual violence cases now. And it's not just in the United States people know what happened in Delhi, they also know about the resistance to what happened in Delhi…in Delhi, at least some people do. There is a sense of feminist pushback in Cairo, and so it's not just women as victims elsewhere, it's also women as activists elsewhere.

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CTM: So, it sounds like then, it's almost a sort of anti-imperialist or anti-colonial, anti-racist analyses that have emerged within feminism maybe have in some way, sort of intervened in the rescue-feminism and the feminist-as-missionary relationship in the global South. Do you think that's possible? I mean it's an interesting question. Because what you said just now—and I completely agree with this, you know, that there is an echoing—that's a nice way of framing it. And the echoing is not happening in relation to the west. Like it's not like, here something happens, then it happens there and comes right back here. It's actually being generated in different spaces and people are hearing and seeing what's going on in different spaces, so, it is not mobilized by any one group of people. So it doesn't have an origin, you know in the US or in the West in a particular way, right? So I'm curious about whether there is less purchase for a kind of missionary or rescue feminism. I'm raising this question

about whether ideas have had…some of the feminist ideas have had some impact that we can—

LEC: And a resistance to the kind of colonial imposition feminism you were talking about. So in the Global South for example, women are not gravitating to that because they recognize what's the missionary aspect of it is. Well, there's some of that in some places.

CTM: In some places.

LEC: In some places, but there is a danger.

LMA: In my day, bourgeois feminism was the term. I think imperial feminism is becoming that term that a lot of younger generation feminists on campuses are aware of…and to see, like is this imperial feminism, is this neoliberal feminism. Unfortunately missionary feminism still exists. A lot of it is informing the presidential discussion.

LEC: Right now, wow, it's something else.

LMA: But I think you know your work has provided an alternative way to think about it. I believe you need to have an alternative. Because we know women are suffering and they say, "What? Women are suffering, we have to do something." and they only have a missionary model as a way—it's either that or quietism—and so I think having the alternative, I mean theoretically elaborated but also practically, that no, there is a different way to do this, I think has had some impact. Just not as much as we want.

CTM: No, no there is nothing as much as we want.

LMA: The FEMEN, you know one the Ukrainian feminist group that was doing the…they wanted to have the shirtless activism, you should get involved in this…

LEC: And there was this big fight about it, yeah.

LMA: In Egypt because—

LEC: They said why can't we—?

LMA: The Ukrainian women sort of decided what the tactic would be, you know laterally. There was some interesting discussion. I heard some different, you know, views on this. Not willing to totally reject them but on the other hand say but they did all wrong. That was an interesting moment because, not just that they did it in a stupid way, but the thing is also, some people had somewhat of a sophisticated understanding of why that was a problem.

CTM: Problem. Right, right.

LEC: So, given what we just talked about and what you said, and you know, some of the disappointments and some of the excitements, exciting things like around labor, feminists organizing in labor movements you may be aware and so and so what's happening in feminism in the academy and outside and some academic feminists who are themselves activists, what do you imagine, what would you like to see, what is your hope, your thinking of the future of feminism? Even just in America would be fine.

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[Laughter]

CTM: Yeah.

LEC: Doesn't have to be…

LMA: Everywhere.

LEC: It would be nice but—how do you see it, imagine?

LMA: Well, I think we have been in defense mode for a long time and I think a lot of the activism around reproductive rights has been in defense mode. And I think to go on offense means, for me centrally it means to go to the labor movement. Inside and outside of the union. It's not just the union, I mean not just there. But that means changing the terms and going back to thinking about the majority of women's lives, not just small groups. And you know, forget the glass ceiling issue, I can't stand that stuff. I mean the focus on…because it's the trickle down that you're going to have. So I think that I would like to see an influx of the energy and optimism and spirit of young feminists involved in labor issues, in all the variety of ways that that can happen. Because I think that part of the reason why, you know things have gotten worse is because there has been this backlash cultural ideology that many young women have…they have not wanted to be gender eliminativists and we could say well, you know, maybe they're just in denial, they're just retrograde, but partly because their lives don't speak to gender eliminativism, of Judy Butler sort of variety, where gender doesn't really make a difference in their practical lives, or their sense of themselves. So I think the gender eliminativist trend has helped to cause a disaffection of masses of women from feminism. "What does that have to do with my life?" I was in a kind of an open forum a few years ago in New York, around Occupy…it was after Occupy…led by some of the feminist activists in Occupy…but they'd gotten a whole lot of people there and there were all these women there from East Harlem, these Latino working class women in particular were there. And the leadership was talking about…we had to go around and identify ourselves and there

was a lot of talk about cisgender and you could pick your pronouns. It was like two hours of this and there was hardly any time left over to actually talk about any specific issues from the Latino feminists—from the Latinos from East Harlem. You know they were coming there wanting—they were wanting some help in their lives and in their communities. They were wanting some direction, they were wanting some help, they were wanting some new language, you know…some thinking. And they didn't get any. They got nothing, in that meeting. It's not that—I mean struggle against heteronormativity needs to happen in every community but I felt like there was such disconnect of priorities between these diverse groups. And we lost—I think we lost those women. And I don't know if they'll come again to another forum of that type. And their vision of what feminism means is, you know—

LEC: And probably left—many of them—not understanding what happened there. You know—the discussion was so exclusionary.

CTM: Some of what this says to me actually, which is dismal in a way, is, what are we teaching?

LEC: Mm-hmm. Well, we talk about that all the time.

CTM: We talk about this all the time. What is it that…it's the same sort of critique that you all had in FMS…is what happens when a particular ideological frame and discourse sort of ends up completely eliminating possibilities of identity, experience, etc., right?

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It's a different way that this is happening but it's the same sort of thing. There is a discursive hegemony of a certain kind of what it means to be a anti-hetero-sexist-gender-whatever-feminist. And that discourse is rarely grounded in people's material lives that involve more than the expression of sexuality or love. Other parts, because our material lives are way more complex than one piece of it, right? So, in some ways it's sort of interesting to me that we did so much work with intersectionality and whatever—but this to me, is also a part of the neoliberal academy. That there's a whole—you know—so, certain discourses get canonized or raised to a level of theoretical—this is theoretical sophistication—but the theoretical sophistication is also an individual, individualist sort of narrative sometimes, about individual identities and the naming of them in public, in certain ways which, to me sometimes it doesn't matter what the hell your identity is—what's the issue that we are organized around? Why should your—how you feel, how you identify be more important? Or, in that moment, why should that be the primary point of entry? Why should—an analysis of the issue—on what are we going to do about it and who does it matter to not be the central discussion? So I think this is a challenge. I think you're completely

right about what it means to—it's not so much losing the category of "women" or something like that. I don't think that's necessarily the case. I think we need to complexify how we think about all of these issues. There's no two ways about that, right? But then we do need to develop a language that would—that does not re-privilege or re-situate ourselves all the time in the discussion, no?

LMA: Yes.

LEC: So this is our collective work ahead.

LEC: Mm-hmm.

LMA: Yes.

LEC: We are trying to challenge those things.

CTM: And I think that some of the work we are doing in talking to you and others—I mean, we are actively, in many ways talking to people on the Left. You know, and one of the things that is emerging is really, how feminist struggle has to be so completely integral and intertwined with the larger questions that are anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and on the Left. You know, that's really clear. But it feels like this stuff needs to be out there in more ways than just scholarly writing.

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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.