Mariam Durrani

05/05/2022

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CTM: So, we are talking to Mariam Durrani today. We are completely delighted to be here! Today is the 5th of May, Cinco de Mayo. So, we just begin by asking you to talk a little bit about your political journey, actually your journey as a feminist scholar activist, and you could talk at whatever levels you want, personal, professional, public, whatever.

MD: First of all, thank you so much. This is such a pleasure and an honor for me to speak to you both about some of what I've done ... because I respect both of you so, so much, and both of you are an inspiration in so many ways. Especially because when I was doing my Master's at the University of New Mexico from 2004 to 2006, I taught a class that was called Third World Women's Representation and Discourse, and your essay was part of my syllabus. And so this is kind of like, levels of cool *[Laughter.]* There's a couple of places to think about in my life story, when I started having some type of political consciousness. And it's weird because my biography is very also kind of like unexpected for some people, because I was born in Lahore and then we migrated as a family to the U.S. Then my father joined the U.S. Army. And so then I grew up on U.S. military bases in Germany. So there was obviously an awareness of how did I get here? *[Laughs.]* Where am I and what's happening? There's just moments, of course, like the Berlin wall came down while we lived there. These kinds of things, world events. But when I was young, I didn't have as much of an understanding of like how to figure out my place in it.

But I think in 2001, after 9/11, when I was a junior at the University of Arizona in Tucson, it was a very quick kind of change that I started finally noticing. And I think I'm a little bit disappointed in myself—*[laughs]*—in that I maintained a certain kind of like naivete about a lot of things and I think that that's continued. But at the same time I have found myself in situations where I think it just became very clear to me that there was an injustice happening here and that I had a position where I could say something, given the story that I have. For example, when I was in Tucson, I became friends with a lot of Pakistani students who were there from Pakistan. And so there was this kind of curiosity that I had, given my upbringing about what does it mean to be in a school with Pakistanis? Cause I had not had that experience ... but then after September 11th, when people started being called in by the FBI that we knew within the MSA ... at the mosque there were events happening ... I was called to speak at an event, and it's kind of strange because I was also asked to wear a hijab to speak. And at the time I did it, but I only did it for that moment. I literally took it off right after, while I was standing outside. And then I really thought later, like that was not fair to be

asked to do that. I should not have maybe done that. But again, I didn't have a developed way of thinking about this.

So I think like a lot of Muslim college students at that time, we were thrust into a conversation that we had not been prepared for at all. And so we were trying to figure out how to make sense of this thing that was going on. And specifically our college newspaper started writing about how Islam was inherently violent and all these kinds of things. I think I looked up, I was like, "are there any Muslims on the staff?" No. So then I wrote to the editor and I was like, you should have somebody to write ... and then I started writing and I was an engineering student, so I really didn't again, have any regular writing as part of my classes. So there were a lot of things that I would just write it however I wanted to write it. But then that also, I think has always been a very liberating thing to not have any training in something and start doing it. For example, I referred to George Bush as Georgie—*[laughter]*—in everything I wrote. Just really was like, I'm just gonna make fun of him. It was like, 20 year old me *[Laughter.]*

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LEC: Georgie *[Laughs.]*

MD: But he just seems...

CTM: I like that. Probably more affection than he deserves, but nevertheless.

MD: Exactly, no, totally. But that was one of the moments that I started to think about myself within a political system of some type and act on that knowledge. Then as time went by that developed and has developed a lot, so I could keep going ...

CTM: Well talk a little bit about sort of your coming into feminist consciousness and—

LEC: And your work in that direction.

MD: That's like a much more, I think my family's background is so important because I was very clear that I was different from my brother. The gendered kind of like differences between me and the only other sibling I had were so explicit over time that it was just for the sake of, calling that out that I was labeled as somebody who like always had something to say or whatever. So, yeah, and then every all my activities were then like attached as like, "oh, she does this because, she's knows this because, these are her friends ... like all these ways that the same things that he's doing are perfectly fine. Or maybe even like he has more liberties than I do, but I am the one who's constantly being told and policed and all this stuff.

So I feel like that's kind of where that consciousness arose, but then there's also like the disparity of watching, like my mother and how my father were so different. There's a lot of things you don't understand when you're a kid, but I think that in the home, in the family, in

the mosque ... being aware, I mean, a lot of Muslim women I think are now organizing and educating around this structural, spacial, segregation that happens and how that reinforces differences when those spaces are not at all similar in size or air quality ... those kinds of things become, those are very visible. And then as I got older, I was kind of like trying to figure out how to orient myself to traditions that I actually felt connection to, but not to the practices that actually distanced me from those traditions. So I feel like that's definitely like where it started and then it became very clear once I was being asked to get married. Now my life kind of like, path is being completely like put in another direction. I can go on and on about that *[Laughs.]*

LEC: So that political consciousness that took you to writing and all that was happening in the United States and the president Georgie and stuff, and that piece that you just described, what was the, how did one impact the other, in other words, how did that consciousness, political consciousness, or how did you bring that in the home? Or could you, or what was that juxtaposition experience for you?

MD: Yeah, because I think trying to figure out how the personal and the political are deeply linked and have always been that is the learning that I go through cyclically [Laughs.] as I start to understand ways that these are connected. So for example, writing these writing these opinion editorials were, it was interesting because I would also write, for example, like when I was in college, my dad was deployed to Qatar. And again, at that time, I didn't really understand how the military apparatus works. And so now I think it's very interesting how those moments played out and how his career played out and all of those things. So that's like another layer that I can understand now, but at that time he was getting deployed. And I was like, this is exactly the thing is that when the war is declared, the people who are sent have no say in what's going on. And my mother was having like her moments that she didn't wanna be left alone. So this whole situation, this is like my entire childhood. It was like framed by U.S. imperial—

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CTM:

Adventures.

MD: Adventures, and then the way that my parents did not connect the personal and the political yeah. Like really kept them completely separate. The economic has no connection to the personal. I think those are the moments where I think I saw those connections, 20 year old me saw that connection and wrote this very like, how I feel about my dad going there. I got letters in the newspaper that were like "you should be ashamed of yourself," or like, "why don't you just go back to Pakistan?". All this kind of stuff. I think at that time, I had a different response where I was like, we grew up on military bases. I understand this country better than you do. Like, how about you take a seat? [Laughs.] I think now I'm kind of a very different, like like still anti-U.S. empire, but like a much more sophisticated [Laughs.] way of understanding all the ways that my family has been implicated in empire. British empire,

U.S. empire. And then now, like how important it is to talk about it. Because otherwise we don't make those connections and people kind of are just reproducing all these very problematic ways of thinking about separating these spaces when they're not, at all.

LEC: So the gender impact part, cause I am struck by how it seems as if you were almost expected to live a bifurcated existence. It's the political you over here and what the family expects over here and you are supposed to figure out how to maneuver that.

MD: I think that's how being an activist was just kind of like a thing that was connected to my work and I was not supposed to bring that home. When those conversations would come into the home, into the marriage, they were not welcome. It's like "that's for work, you need to understand the separation." Like everybody has a job *[Laughs.]*.

LEC: You too *[Laughter.]*

MD: Yeah, exactly! So this is just your job, so don't bring the job into the home. I think that's been a struggle. It's been always like an up and down. It depends on the specific moment ... and also depends on how I'm doing in terms of now I feel like I'm able to not internalize how they would judge me, but I think when I was younger, that was the thing. So it was very contradictory.

CTM: Yeah. It's all the daughter expectations.

MD: Yeah. For example, I started the PhD as a married mother of a four-month-old ... talk about bifurcated, like yeah. I was going to classes and then coming home and then hopping into the, I'm going to take care of the home and taking care of her. I'm taking care of all these things. And that was the expectation. Is that you have to do both because you're allowed to do this one.

LEC: Challenging.

MD: But I think again, as I started maybe—I think ethnography is an interesting method in the sense that I had not even studied anthropology before I did a Ph.D. in anthropology, and I think that's kind of like—

CTM: So what, took you there?

LEC: And from engineering?

MD: So my undergraduate was in engineering and then I started writing. And so when I was completing my degree, I was applying for jobs through the engineering career center people. And then I thought about doing a Masters in English. My mother did her Master's from Punjab University and she did her Masters in geography, but M.A. in English was like, very recognizable as a thing to do. Yeah. and so there was an encouragement to do that,

specifically. I say that because like later, when I wanna do the PhD, my mom was like, "just … get married and then do the PhD". *[Laughter.]*

CTM: Yeah, you can do the Ph.D. but …

MD: It's a prerequisite for the PhD to get married. So when I was ... where was I?

CTM: So anthropology, you went into anthropology.

MD: Yeah. So I think like when I was doing my Master's, I was teaching, and the teaching was great because it got me out of engineering as a professional career, and really gave me another option. Then I was teaching in Pakistan and and I started noticing kind of the way that people would mix Urdu and English, and how that was kind of like playing out in all these ways. And so I decided to do my Ph.D. in education, in Educational Linguistics. Then I decided to take a class in linguistic anthropology because it seemed like a very important connection, and then I added the anthro. So it really was not, I did not enter it with the same, I think as a lot of anthropologists do, which I think has been both like very isolating, but also probably for the best, because anthropology …

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CTM: You could be more creative this way.

MD: And I'm not bound to the discipline, I'm not invested in the discipline.

CTM: So Mariam, a lot of the work you've been doing for the last few years has been very public, in terms of addressing questions of Islamophobia and racism and so on. So talk a little bit about one, how you get there, how you got there. I mean, clearly the way you described the 20-year-old Miriam, I can see that there, there is a thread and a continuity there, but what you have been doing for the last five years, maybe ten, I don't know. It feels like it requires being in the public eye in a particular way. It requires taking some very courageous stands ... talk a little bit about that, like reflect on that. What takes you there and why is this important to do? Cause you must be also kind of alone in some of this.

MD: *[Laughs.]* Yeah. I think it's been very challenging for those reasons. But I think it really kind of, when I was in grad school, for example, I think what I was saying before about, I had a baby, I was taking classes, so I was really just overwhelmed with all of that. Then I did do some like ethnographic filmmaking work around South Asian students at Penn, and then another project with graduate students with kids where we were trying to kind of make a film to give the university qualitative examples of like analysis around these issues. So there were like these moments where I was trying to take research and research methods, and connect it to important urgent issues that needed to be addressed. But then when I did my field work and I was doing my field work, especially in New York ... there were the signs that were posted around in the MSA where I was doing field work that the NYPD is watching—

CTM: MSA, Muslim Student Association.

MD: Sorry, yes, Muslim Student Association, so the college Muslim Student Association at this university, at this public college in New York, had signs that talked about the NYPD was listening, so don't talk about political convos. So this was a thing that I was like, okay, I did not know how the identity of being Muslim was going to come into the work. I was originally really just focusing on language, and all these other kind of things that students were doing. But then, as this became part of the ethnographic work, I was aware of that. Then I went back to Penn and it was revealed with the Associated Press Report that Penn was one of the universities where the NYPD had been surveilling. So this is in Philly. They were also surveilling in Princeton, New Jersey. And there were some events that we had on campus, we called like the lawyers to come and speak to the students about this. And then nothing happened after that. Like, there was no kind of conversation moving forward. The president of the university made some private statements to students, but no public condemnation of it. There was such an uneven response from university administrations around this. And this was kind of like the way that I had been seeing ... nobody was really speaking up. In the university where you're having all these conversations about racial justice, why is this topic not being recognized as related to these other injustices that are happening? I think that that's where in my writing of my research, I wanted to write about that, but I had not really been trained in those fields. And so it was kind of like, that was the next few years, I think, was like training myself and learning and reading. I was lucky enough when I was doing my postdoc that I got involved with like a Black Studies reading group. So I started to finally read a lot more than I had been and that's where I started to say, okay, I actually need to write this. This is actually a big, big part of what I'm doing. So once I started writing scholarly analysis about and critiquing U.S. empire in the university, like now I've kind of gone there *[Laughs.]* Where not only am I speaking about this in classes or what have you, but now my scholarship is really developing this work. I was asked to contribute to in linguistic anthropology, around language of Islamophobia. So that really developed, again, my own understanding of these issues and how to analyze them and how to talk about them. To talk about them with different audiences. And that became really important to me was, I'm writing these pieces, but how do I make sure that it is also being connected to different audiences? Cause the whole point, of course, is to connect to organizing. So fortunately there were, there was this group called Language and Social Justice in Practice. So everyone in that group is doing work like this. I was around people who were doing this work.

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And then when I moved to Hamilton College in 2017, I started in the Anthropology department. And I started getting targeted ... that really kind of changed how I was connecting previously to the way that U.S. empire and the war on terror shapes higher education. And now it's the 20 years kind of like, look at where it started and where I am now ... there was a part of it where it's like, I knew I was gonna be doing this work, I knew that there was gonna be a backlash to this work. I didn't expect that my institution would stand by and almost like green light it. I don't know if that's naive of me or if I'm just kind of like in the wrong place at the wrong time.

But that was like another thing that if I don't speak up that this is happening to me, then no one is even gonna know ... there's no, there's no record of it. There's no—it just passes. And because I've heard so many people talk about this, and of course, like at some point I think I felt like I was a case study for presumed incompetent, like the next volume. I could be like "oh, I have a story." And it's like, we all have the stories. I think that's when I was seeking out conversations where I could talk about it. That's where I actually met Meredith Madden who was part of DK. She encouraged me to apply and that's where I feel like, again, I wanted to connect with other scholars who were dealing with this and could help me figure out how to deal with it. Because I knew I was not encountering these as new things. These are practices and strategies that have been used to target scholars who speak up for so long. And so then I think it's just not feeling that raising this topic is somehow marking me. That's the hard part to figure out how to do it in a way that I don't feel like I'm performing. But I'm actually kind of like, there's a building here, and that's why I feel like this conversation is so great because it's like, I'm putting this story in a conversation rather than trying to make a claim for rights that I've not been given or something, but that's not, that's actually not the point. The point is, this is gonna keep happening. We, we need to archive it. We need to have a record.

LEC: So this is a kind of political activism that emerged out of your experience, what's happening to you, and your body and this institution, but you recognize you're not the only one. So that's crucial. Yeah. And how that activism came out of a kind of resistance, a personal resistance in your own life. And now they have merged. So you see that activism at this point now absolutely necessary in these institutions or in any way related to the larger policy?

MD: Can I ask a clarifying question? What do you mean, like that activism ...

LEC: That from when you started in your own personal life then—I mean, that was activism—for that kind of resistance and then you get into an institution where it becomes something really crucial, and big, and you are targeted. But you are astute enough to recognize that this is a political kind of activity that happens to other people. And so, so that's what I mean. So how do you see that as connected to the larger social scheme of things where so much of that happens? So what's happening on the street, is mirrored in the academy.

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MD: Absolutely. I mean … I think there's another layer to my response to being targeted. Which is that, when I was in college, I was raped when I was in my first year, and it's not something that I was really able to have a conversation about for a long time. Actually like 13 years after it happened is when I think I finally told my parents about it. So that was unfolding alongside all of these other conversations. I think that becoming more conscious of that political identity, that in some sense survivors have similarly are interpolated into this conversation. So I just didn't want to be interpolated into that conversation. I wasn't ready to

be, I, I had no tools for dealing with that conversation. But I think like, as I have developed my own ability to see that, to talk about that, all of those things ... that has been part of the thing of like, I will not allow myself to be in a situation where I am, I am being treated like being oppressed, being like subjugated, being dominated and I am aware of it and I continue to be in that situation. That's kind of like the thing that just like snaps. On Instagram. I have an account called DrFeministSnap, cause it's like inspired by how Sarah Ahmed talks about the feminist snap, where like at some point you're just like, that's it. We're done.

CTM: Yeah, I won't put up. No more.

MD: There's just—this has gone too far. And I feel like it's sometimes really late for me. The funny thing is like, people are like, oh, you have like, , you're always like that. And I'm like, I wish you knew how long it took me to figure this out. Are you kidding me? Like, I actually like signed up for all the things, for a long time. Now I'm finally just saying like, no, that's cool. I'm not doing it. But, it's a hard decision. And even taking it, leaving the academy right now, resigning from my position, it's such a isolating set of decisions and it's looked upon by others as like, "oh, that's so great. Like you just did it." It's just like, mm it's kind of like I had no other choice choice because I was being treated so badly. So like any romanticization of this, let's just keep the perspective of like, why and how this came to be and what that tells us about the larger story. Again, me not being an exception, me being another story of somebody who has been pushed out because they had the audacity to take a position that human life is worth fighting for no matter what. I feel like that's part of— in this last week, the newspaper on campus published an account. So one of the things that happened is that nine professors have resigned this semester and six of them are faculty of color or queer faculty. And so they did a study, a report on it. And in the report, one of the people who gives a statement about—from the organization that has been targeting me—and it just like ever since I read it last week it's just been like a chill in my body. Like, yeah, right. This is what's actually happening here. I've had wonderful students who have stood up for me and all this like nice stuff, but like at the end of the day this is the story.

CTM: And these are the people who have the power, and these are the people who have the ear of the administration. It's normalized.

MD: Yeah, exactly. It's going to be more and more—mean, this is what I mean is like, so 2013/14, my research site is being surveilled by the NYPD, my university where I'm getting my Ph.D. is being surveilled, I start my first tenure track position. And then I am surveilled and targeted by not the government, but similar, I mean what the government has looked like since 2017, 2016, as we know.

CTM: Yeah. It's all of these kind of think tanks that get created in neoliberal institutions that are basically doing the work of the state.

MD: And actually copying in some sense, right. I mean thinking about now the Patriot Act as this kind of official sanctioning of surveillance of Muslim communities for Homeland Security. And how that is reproduced, even if it's not done by the state, by state proxies. By

like author institutional authorities and all this. Yeah. So as I've been developing my work over the last five years, and I know what my book is gonna be about, and I know that this is how these people don't value this work. Yeah. I feel like it's maybe also a silver lining in some sense where it's like now I actually have maybe even more ... autonomy to not connect my scholarship to promotion.

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CTM: Do you feel like in doing all this work, you have actually had community?

MD: I think I've been in different communities at different points ... and at that point, when I was in that community, I think it was great. It was that moment I needed that support and then for whatever reason, that was not the space. And so I feel like, more recently I've been talking to a lot of Muslim feminist scholars who are writing about something in relationship to the War on Terror. So people who are racialized and gendered in particular ways, based on their scholarship and the topic of their scholarship and their location. I think this is now like a different conversation that I couldn't have been a part of maybe a couple years ago. Because I had not developed my work in understanding to that point. So I think that's, that's one of the ways like, DK was I think another environment where I got to kind of see how feminist scholars are debating these really complex issues. There's a lot that I learned from seeing that, and trying to understand where would I fit in or what contribution do I have to make to what's happening here. Also just to learn, there was so much that I was, again, like a student that gets to see something different. Cause again, my Ph.D. was not necessarily connected to that field. But it's always been a thread, right? Like it's always present because I, I knew that I'm a feminist, that I want to do feminist work, but what that means was not very clear to me given my particular kind of like—

CTM: Trajectory. Yeah. Because it's usually when, when we are asked that question, we can usually pinpoint certain moments ... in which we actually are within particular communities that allow us to see certain things and, that comes from occupying those spaces. But if you have to make your own way in many situations, it's very hard to count on this.

LEC: You come to recognize and appreciate that that trajectory doesn't have to be linear and usually isn't. So you find your space and your place based on the location of that thing, whatever is happening and where you are. So yours is as relevant as all the others. And it's quite intense, I must say. It's quite intense. So when people say to you, you have a lot of courage and that's really great. I mean, that's kind of infuriating in a way, and I hear what you're saying, but at the same time, when you look around you don't see this. You don't see this. People in the academy ... courageous is not something you attach to them. Lack of courage. [Laughter.] Courage is in short supply.

MD: It's weeded out though, right? It's also almost like that—

CTM: It's disciplined.

MD: Yeah, exactly. Like, going into grad school, everyone comes in thinking that they're gonna do so many things. And then our experiences during grad school are one kind of stratifying moment. And then on the tenure track, like it's so clear the people that I came in with, where, what they're doing and how I ... yeah.

CTM: And, and your journey. So you've talked quite a bit about sort of challenges and different things that you faced. So, so talk a little bit maybe about what you see as necessary in terms of building bridges, crossing borders within sort of Muslim feminists, but also larger feminists of color, global, global south feminist communities ...

MD: I have, yeah, no, I'm excited to talk about this because I think this is where my project on The Roti Collective is kind of my ... is where I'm experimenting and trying to think through all of this. So The Roti Collective is a public feminist project that looks like a series of engagements in academic spaces and in community spaces. It really started on social media during the pandemic, when everyone was making sourdough bread [Laughs] I tried, it did not work for me. But roti again is like this, this practice, this tradition that I grew up with, my mother made roti at home, and this is again where like at home, we're living on a U.S. military base—

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CTM: And you're making roti!

MD: *[Laughs.]* But my mom is making roti every night and the home is like Little Punjab or something *[Laughs].* There's always like some type of ... the cuisine was just very, very clearly like what my parents liked. And even now it's like, after two, three days, it's like, let's bring the roti back, where's the roti? *[Laughter.]* So I had this relationship to roti and I also had the relationship to roti where when I was in middle school, my mother was like, now it's your turn to come to learn how to make roti. And I did, my brother's did not. So when I was, again, going through all these things, I was like, I'm not making roti. I've done all this other stuff, but I'm not going to do that. But then I think during this time when everybody was at home and not going anywhere and it's just me and my daughter at home I got interested in it, I wanted to think about it. And it also came up in my research with Pakistani students in Pakistan and then students in New York, where they would exchange roti memes with each other. And they would like, they would have jokes about, how round your roti is and all this ways of talking about ... what a good wife you would be is how people would talk about roti in this way. And then like the memes were like a joke on that. So there was like a meme that was ... there's a roti that's like all misshapen, not round. And then there's a round one. And then underneath the one that's not round it says like if you don't love me at my this, then you can't have me when I'm a round roti *[Laughs.]*

Speaker 2: *[Laughter]*

MD: So roti was just like something that I was really, really fascinated by. And then I started the project. And so the idea is that I want to get into doing research on roti, but centering roti making as the entry point to the conversation. So like all the talk around the making of it is where—there's all other stuff about it. Like roti has a very interesting history, but I think every time we're trying to center the making, I think in doing so we're centering the labor that goes into roti, continuing to be a tradition. Like all the people who make it such that we can talk about it and we have all this, like, intimacy, and the intimacy that gets created by talking about roti with people who maybe ... example we did some research projects with students and in November, one of the student research projects was by Raveena. And so Ravenna, her family is from Guyana. She's Indo-Guyanese and grew up in New York and ...

CTM: And grew up with rotis.

MD: And grew up with rotis. And she decided to make a podcast about her family ... her mother learning how to make roti and talking to her aunts about making roti and all this stuff. And then we had an event at the Philadelphia Asian Arts Initiative, which is a community center there where my mother and Raveena's mother both made roti. I gave like a little talk about roti and then we had them talk about making roti with like a moderator. So that was kind of, I think, how the direction I wanna move in when thinking about kind of like the future of feminist praxis, where a lot of things that can be brought together in a way that helps people see and recognize what is shared and also what is commensurable, and this is where there's a fantastic piece written by Savannah Shange and Roseann Liu called Thick Solidarity where they developed this idea of thick solidarity by talking about Roseann, who is Chinese American, talking to her mother about a incident in New York, where it was a Chinese police officer who killed a Black man and the, the way that he was being held accountable and kind of like all the conversations around race that were happening. And this concept was basically where, hey talk about thick solidarity.

Thick solidarity is how we understand that there are certain kind of incommensurabilities that do not need to be understood in order to work together. And I feel like that's what I'm trying to kind of bring into thinking about roti. Is because a lot of times, like my mom was like, "oh, this is how roti is done." And then I think by going through this whole event, like her understanding of roti has really changed, and she was not exposed to any of this, history, and that is the kind of connection that again, like we don't necessarily center. But it's very rich, it's deep, there's so much there. So, yeah, that's kind of like the direction I've been thinking about, and I'd like to make a documentary about it. I think that would be like really fun. And again, like material that is for different ages, like I think there could be a children's book.

[00:43:52]

CTM: Yeah. And what's interesting, of course, is that it is such a South Asian diaspora thing. So in some ways, just even thinking, and this whole idea of making roti, it's about thinking deeply about women and labor and food, which is such a key aspect of connection and intimacy between women—

LEC: It's diaspora and solidarity making. That people really are connected across borders, just in this kind of way that it happens without any recognizable connection in their trajectories, like your mother and Susanna's mother.

MD: Exactly, yeah.

LEC: What does that mean? These people come in the same place and actions sometimes by the state create that solidarity. Immediate connection of a recognizable sameness that you didn't know was there. It's really crucial.

CTM: That's really cool. I mean, I wanna see how it comes together.

MD: Yeah, no, I'm excited.

LEC: How it plays out, develops.

MD: Yeah. I'm excited. I wanna do more events, more public events. I think that would be really fun. I just did a roti party with Hamilton College students. Where similarly I gave a little talk, and then I made roti—*[laughs]*— and that was my first time making roti in front of an audience. When I was like mixing the flower, I was just thinking to myself, like how many generations of women in my family have been standing in front of flower, like this ... rolling out, but I'm about to do it for a bunch of students [Laughs.] on a college campus. But there is again, like this continuity of teaching, of helping the next generation be nourished. Like there's all these interesting kind of like layers. I just love thinking about roti because as I've been dealing with all this difficult kind of professional stuff, I feel like this project has been the project that reminds me that like, this is why I like research. This is why I love doing this work. Fortunately this work is not being targeted so I can do it with that autonomy, versus like this other work, which again, it just, it comes with it. Like there's a certain kind of normalization that certain areas of scholarship will be targeted. And that other scholars stand by while that happens. I feel like, again, there's no really recourse if that's the prevailing pattern.

LEC: Exactly. There's so much of this though, there's so much of this that the silence in academia allows for that slow death, of some serious activism that would emerge otherwise, prevents it. And what you were saying before, moving into anthropology, without being the anthropologist, that's all part of that happening because, and talking about the training ... how are we trained? We're trained in isolation. we're trained to work alone. We get rewarded for that. That is part of the controlling mechanism in these institutions. So you do that and then you have experiences that say, it would be good if we could come together, but there has never been any kind of togetherness. So you have to learn this, this comes through political action of resistance. And it's so hard because of the lack of courage. So what you have is an, an understanding of what's wrong, but rather than support and togetherness, you have people saying that's really good for you. *[Laughter.]* Really good that you did that. But it's really underneath it, "better you than me." That's the missing piece.

[00:48:03]

MD: Absolutely.

CTM: So the Roti Collective idea ... I mean, it's interesting to me that that was your response to the question around solidarity. *[Laughter.]*

LEC: Building that solidarity.

MD: So it's really, and that's so poignant in a way, because it takes it outside, the kind of, just the theorizing of what it means to really thinking about praxis. This idea of making something together, making food together and making particularly roti, which has a history and a genealogy, which actually crosses because of the diaspora crosses lots of national boundaries and cultural boundaries too. So what's interesting is that there's such a sense of hopefulness about that. It doesn't require that the women you work with, or whoever you work with have a particular political perspective walking into this idea of a collective. But the collective then can become the space for certain kinds of discussions that could lead to some more public actions.

LEC: Beyond normative expectations too. Beyond normative expectations. Whatever those are, this is a creating of something else.

MD: Absolutely. Yeah. And I think the other part, the collective, is also where I want to kind of conceptually and methodologically bring the feminist, ethics in. Because the idea is that there is that no claim to roti. You can't claim it. I think that's part of Raveena's project was really poignant in that way because her podcast starts off with this beautiful story about how she was in a restaurant with her friend who is Indian-American. And she says, "oh, I'm so excited to eat roti" and her friend's like, "that's not how you pronounce it." And she's like, "wait, how could I not be pronouncing something right that I've been eating my whole life?" Like what does that mean? So I feel like that rejection of purity, authenticity right. If again, center the making right. And we center, like what we know by observing the making, or talking about the making, then we actually come to see that it's pretty much the same thing.

Actually that's one of the things that I love about watching it on social media, is that when you watch people, how they're making it ... the physical movements, the embodied actions are you could almost laminate them on top of each other, everyone's hands. You could probably do an interesting graphic where you have that, and you can see how the knowledge is in the body. The knowledges of the making ... all that learning or teaching and the diffusion of all the people across British colonies. And later through immigration in the Americas or in Western spaces like that got carried, it's so incredible. Like to think for example there's chapati, there's all these other words. And so it's again, not about even the word. It's about the making of this thing that we can refer to in these different ways.

CTM: Which is basically the making of bread, and the kind of resonance that has—actually cross culturally—is really quite stunning.

LEC: So the knowledge becomes, it's like inherent ... it's there, it goes from generation to generation in a kind of automatic knowing. A cultural understanding. So that the Indo-Guyanese who probably have been in Guyana for a couple centuries. Are they? Yeah, just about … and their counterparts from Pakistan and India ... which they feel connected to still. Through more than roti.

MD: Of course. Yeah.

CTM: So I think we, we have, because I'm trying to be conscious of time ...

MD: I just wanna say one more, really quick thing about roti. I mean, to speak of the solidarity ... I was contacted on social media, by a student who's doing her Master's at Columbia her name is Arwa and she is from the Dawoodi Bohra community. And they—it's a smaller community of Shia Muslims. And they have a religious leader who in 2015 started a global roti making initiative where he made roti on video and at major events. And he was encouraging everyone to make roti. And it became part of their like spiritual message for that year where everyone who was connected to the community, got like packages of flour to make roti at home. And that like, no one should sleep hungry. That was the idea. So just speaking of like how—I don't know what this will reveal, but I'm so excited about this type of thing where like, people hear about it and they're like, "oh, and so now she is making a post for us about her community and their making initiative."

CTM: Yeah. It's amazing, isn't it? So anything else, Mariam, you want to share that we haven't asked you?

MD: No, this is great. This is awesome. *[Laughs.]*

LEC: We think so too.

CTM: Thank you so much for this

LEC: And having us in your home yes. Done right in your home.

MD: I know this is so nice. It's documenting a moment.

CTM: Yes it certainly is!

[00:54:30 end video]

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.