Feminist Freedom Warriors

Nadje Al-Ali

4/9/18

[00:00:00]

CTM: So, welcome Nadje,

NAA: Thank you.

CTM: We are talking to Nadje at Syracuse University on the 9th of April 2018. So really delighted you could join us.

NAA: Thank you for inviting me.

CTM: Yeah. And - so maybe we can start by you telling us a little bit about how you've come to do the kind of feminist work that you've been involved with for many many years now.

NAA: I think sort of my feminist life, well my more active one really started in Egypt. So I went to Egypt actually just to study Arabic for post-credit - it was part of my post credit degree but then I ended up spending six years in Cairo. And while I studied at the University in Cairo sociology and anthropology and one of my best friends was Palestinian and she started taking me to a feminist organization in Cairo. And it was difficult for me because my Arabic wasn't that great and everything was in Arabic but I sort of started to get involved. And yeah we would have discussions about it afterwards and at some point my friend said don't just come to meetings why don't you get involved more actively. And so my - the idea for my PhD grew out of that experience. Because this was in the late eighties early nineties and in terms of the scholarship around the middle east and women - Muslim women - there was sort of a challenge of the idea of the homogenous Muslim woman and there was lots of stress on diversity, diversity of Islamic practice, diversity amongst Muslim women. But when it came to secular women it was - it was almost - they were described as 'women who are not religious' in a very simplistic and

homogenizing manner. And so the organization that I was involved in was sort of a Marxist, secular organization and I knew there were many other secular feminist groups in Egypt and I was interested in finding out well what does secularism mean in the Egyptian context. So yeah my political experiences and I guess my discomfort with the scholarship at the time prompted me to do my research for my PhD. I sought out Deniz Kandiyoti at SOAS because I liked her scholarship. And because of the topic I chose, that meant that for my PhD research I was very much involved with the Egyptian women's movement. Now at the same time in the nineties I had also become more interested in what's happening in Iraq. So I'm half Iraqi but I grew up in Germany and since I was in Iraq during the invasion of Kuwait and that really affected me, and then I also went to Iraq in ninety-seven after seven years of economic sanctions on Iraq. And I was so shocked to see the difference. When I left Iraq in 1990 sort of mid August 1990 and sort of seven years later I came and I saw really a totally different society after seven years of sanctions and it affected my family very much so. And I think for me at that moment I started to feel, really my privilege as someone - I could have easily been born and raised in Iraq I mean when my parents married the idea was they would go back to Iraq but ended up staying in Germany. And so I really - speaking to my cousins my age my really large family and I thought oh my god if I would be in their shoes, and I had this cousin who could come in and out, and who had been staying in the States and grew up in Germany studied in the States, now lived in Egypt, I think I would maybe feel envious or resentful. And I was so humble that they were just really interested in my life the seemed very happy for me. I mean I did -I remember consciously thinking I really need to do something with my privilege that is linked to Iraq. So parallel to doing my PhD I started to get involved in in anti-sanctions activism while being based in Britain, but the anti-sanctions activism in Britain was problematic for me and the other Iraqis because it was the British left that in the name of anti-imperialism was advocating against sanctions but was glossing over the atrocities by the regime of Saddam Hussein. So several of us, of Iraqi origin or mixed background started this organization Act Together: Women Against Sanctions On Iraq, but really tried to have a more intersectional approach to sanctions to say 'yes we are against sanctions because it's actually not affecting the regime but ordinary Iraqis' and I was trying to start documenting the impact of the sanctions on women and gender relations in Iraq, but at the same time saying well but this is a horrible regime involved in human rights abuses.

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CTM: Right.

NAA: And that due to the very unfortunate developments in relation to Iraq that then metamorphosed into anti-war anti-invasion activism and then once invasion happened trying to raise awareness about the impact of the invasion and occupation on women and gender relations in Iraq and I should also say that I was very lucky when I when I did my PhD at SOAS in London, by sheer chance ended up renting a room in the house of a very well-known feminist sociologist Cynthia Coburn and she was writing a book called *The Space Between Us*...

Feminist Freedom Warriors

CTM: I remember that.

NAA: At the time that I that was writing my PhD so we were exchanging chapters and her kitchen was the hub for feminists from around the world. So there was constantly someone visiting, we would be sitting on the floor writing placards. She was involved in Women in Black and Women Against Fundamentalism so I got involved and you know for the first time I met a feminist who was actually, how should I put it, I really really respected that she was actually practicing in her everyday life what she was writing about because I had unfortunate experiences previously, especially in Cairo, with feminist scholars whose work I very much respected but when I saw how they were treating people in everyday life I was very disappointed. So with her I found someone who was really an academic activist who was also really trying to translate her values into everyday interactions and I found that very inspiring. Yeah and so you know things have developed from there. It's been, unfortunately the situation in Iraq has gone from bad to worse. I've been focusing on Iraq for a long time. But about three years ago after I had written an article on the impact of, well ISIS and gender based violence in Iraq I thought 'I need to take a break you know just for my own sanity'. And at the time the situation in Turkey in relation to the Turkish Kurdish conflict seemed to be much more hopeful there was a peace process going on, I was very impressed by Turkish feminists I'd met at the same time I was interested in this for me it was a bit of a conundrum, or you know a puzzle, you have these Kurdish women fighters fighting ISIS who are glorified in the western media...

CTM: Absolutely.

LEC: Uh huh.

NAA: But at the same time, the PKK, the Kurdish workers party that is really underlying this movement is criminalized and you know is supposed to be a terrorist organization so I - you know, got curious and also because I had done research on the Kurdish women's movement in Iraq and everyone told me that the Kurdish women's movement linked to Turkey and the PKK as very very different and so I started to, with a colleague who's currently in Syracuse University Dr. Latif Tas, we did joint research on the intersections between peace and feminist activism in Turkey in the Kurdish movement but unfortunately the moment we started fieldwork the situation kind of exploded in Turkey. But that's - I've been focusing on that for the last two years and I've been also now involved in the situation of Kurds in Turkey and the diaspora.

LEC: It feels like, you know Nadje, that neoliberalism, this space that we find ourselves in and this current phase of capitalism is like all-consuming. Like there's destruction, it feels like everywhere of all levels of activism. It's very interesting what you just laid out - how do you see that work in a larger frame of transnational feminist scholar activism? And where do you think there's hope that we can continue what we do, those of us that do this kind of work, where do you see it going in your own context?

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NAA: Well my own context so I guess one contact is the University - the institution. So I'm based at SOAS within the UK SOAS is probably one of the more progressive and radical places that are sort of trying to push back but I mean we feel it in our everyday practice we've had, a couple of years ago tuition fees that - when I started teaching in the UK we didn't have to pay tuition fees and it was three thousand pounds and now it's nine thousand pounds. And I acutely feel how student expectations and attitudes are changing, they're becoming customers we are incredibly - increasingly asked to work in certain statistics and measurements you know whether it's our research or teaching so I find it very constraining and for the first time in my academic life this round of - we have like this eight year cycle of what we call research exercise framework where everyone's research outputs - you know that's what it's called - what's being assessed and for the first time these past years I've been thinking 'should I publish here or there because this journal costs more' and I find this really problematic because for me you know it would be absurd writing about the impact of the invasion on women and gender relations in Iraq to write a journal where now the twenty experts in the field are reading it as opposed to make it more accessible to a wider readership and audience. I mean until quite recently when someone asks me, 'don't you feel there's a tension between an academic and activist - which interestingly it's mainly people here in this country where people ask me - it's not so much in the UK or Europe.

CTM: Or in other parts of the world too.

NAA: If we were in the Middle East I would never be asked that- yeah in this country. But I have to say I start to feel there is a tension in a sense you know that I politically think that I feel that my research or my academic work is less valuable but that I'm pulled in different directions you know? And the pressures are such now because of increased neoliberalization that I feel that I have to be pragmatic and check the box before I can then do what I really want to do and I resent this very much. So that's one level. Now in terms of activism I'll have to say that one reason I felt that I needed to take a break from Iraq and doing research and working with women's rights activists because of security - sorry - because of the security situation in Iraq, the only place where I could go and do research and be involved with women's rights activists was the North—the Kurdish area. But I witnessed over a period of five, six, seven years how foreign funding, neoliberalization and this whole kind of agenda of bringing democracy and human rights had a very corrupting influence and I mean I was very disappointed in some of the Kurdish women's rights activists who initially I really respected - particularly because they were working across all ethnic and religious divides and I felt there were more feminist than nationalist, but every year I could see sort of changes, you know. And at some point it was very clear what was going on was of course this - what has been documented in so many different contexts of the world that sort of lots of money was thrown to a specific organization and you know at some point first of all the programs were all about women's empowerment and women as business leaders you know and getting sort of increasingly out of touch.

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CTM: With any kind of grassroots program.

NAA: Yes with any kind of grassroots and also with any kind of radical or political transformation to the extent that I mean I felt I was part of a project and I realized there was corruption and I felt I don't want to have anything to do with it. And I have to say it was really painful - I was invested in the project so I've seen that and I have to say with that experience I felt so inspired by the Kurdish movement - the Kurdish women's movement in Turkey, a totally different ballgame. I mean, you know despite all odds without funding and commitment initially I was so skeptical about the idea of joint leadership because I knew that in the Iraqi context, quota - the women's quota was played out in a way that you know women are often sort of tokenistic or outside of cosmetic exercise or you have the wives, sisters and daughters of male politicians in power so when I heard that the Kurdish women's movement or the Kurdish political movement linked to the PKK - there is any kind of leadership position there is a man and a woman. But actually what I saw, it wasn't tokenistic I mean there was a real attempt to address gender based inequalities and to really transform society. And for a moment I was on this high I thought 'oh my god this is amazing'. By now, sort of two and a half years down the line, I see lots of problems with it as well. But I would say in terms of pushing back against kind of neoliberalism, capitalism is probably the most radical inspiring there is, certainly in the context of the Middle East. My problem with the movement is that it's too much focused on the leader of the Ocalan (?) although I mean I've also written about the fact that it's not because of the Ocalan says, 'a b and c' that 'a b and c' happens it's because women at every step fight for 'a b and c'. The other problem I have is the way sexuality is totally bracketed off and yeah you have to be a sexless militant whether man or woman in order to be part of egalitarian society and I don't think this is sustainable because reproduction and sexuality happens and either you create a kind of Utopian society within an armed unit or political organization and then there's society out there, where you still maintain certain codes around honor and conservative gender norms. Anyway this is a long winded answer but to say in terms of - I mean I see, you know the impact and the challenges of encroaching neoliberalism both in academia and I'm lucky to be in an institution that is pushing back but I feel we are beleaguered increasingly and it feels very tight now and difficult and I also see it in the various feminist movements in the Middle East. You know some are pushing back and some are - some are buying into it critically and some are kind of using things strategically you know, and I think it's quite a continuum going on.

CTM: So partly what you're talking about is that they're pushing back against certain kinds of patriarchies and paternalisms.

NAA: Yes, yes.

CTM: And conservative sexualities that are being…

NAA: Yeah definitely and some contexts you know, what you're pushing against, is sort of, for us I guess being based in the west it looks more radical I mean in some conext like you know in Iraq since invasion social conservatism and you know patriarchal gender norms. You can't even

say it's going back to something it's very new it's very modern but it's extremely regressive and conservative. Yeah I mean the way that sectarianism religious sectarianism is very much thriving through the control of women's bodies and sexualities after the invasion of Iraq. But it was a Sunni Islamist militia group or Shia Islamist militia group when they started to move into neighborhood and try to control it they all did the same: the first thing they put out leaflets to say 'women you have to wear hijab have to wear Islamic dress, then you know that would control who's going to work who's driving and you know sort of the idea that you create these communities, these sectarian communities and one demarcator or boundary-maker is 'you're a woman'. So feminist in Iraq and I should say that after 2003 you had the kind of mushrooming of feminist organizations in Iraq while in other countries they already existed. But during the Ba'ath regime there was no independent women's movement of any sort. So you know what they have to push back things like what's called the Ja'fari Law. It relates to what we call the personal status code in Muslim-majority contexts as a set of laws it is based on specific interpretation of Islamic law that govern divorce of marriage, divorce, child custody in inheritance and Iraq did actually have a very progressive - well, relatively progressive law and that was - that applied to both Sunni and Shia Iraqis and ever since invasion there's this attempt to - sectarianize the law have a set of laws for Sunni and another one for Shia - which is really bad for those families you know like my grandparents who were "Sushi" you know? And we had lots of intermarriages in Iraq but also, especially for the Shia side, you know some of the gendered implications are quite outrageous. So for instance, that it would be okay for a nine year old girl to get married. So these are the kind of things that feminists in Iraq are fighting, while in Lebanon, just to give you an example that - huge variations in the region as well, you know you have a situation where you actually have LGBT, and also queer feminists who you know are pushing boundaries and you know actually challenging heteronormativity...although in that context actually that's sort of another tension whereby I would say LGBT organizations are monopolized by gay men - by middle class gay men get funding from US institutions you know sort of make deals…

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CTM: Sounds familiar.

NAA: They make deals with the state and the police who, at the same time crackdown and you know terribly treat migrant laborers or refugees, but you know it's okay to align yourself with the state supposedly because then you have some freedom and recognition, and so one big tension is that between queer feminists who say 'no that is not what we are after and we don't want to take money from the United States, we don't want to engage in a single issue campaign, and we certainly need to look at sexuality in an intersectional manner'. So yes, I've been quite involved in that because I'm part of a journal called *Kohl: A Journal of Gender and Body Research*. It's a new journal that grew out of well, a queer feminist experience in Beirut and its group of new generation feminists in the region and what is really great about the journal is that it's both

English and Arabic everything gets translated into English and Arabic, and it provides a platform for manly young researchers and activist in the region, to address previous taboo issues you know around body and sexuality but always you know in terms of larger questions.

CTM: So what your saying though - what's interesting to me about listening to this is really sort of the variations in terms of how people take on feminist questions whether they are connected - because I think queer movements don't have to be feminist movements, right? So - and they can be neoliberal queer movements, and we've seen many such, - but and feminist movements don't have to be anti-racist for anti-imperialist either so it can be that kind of feminism. So what you're describing is a sort clear separation of women who are in fact that and that - yeah, who are taking on some of those larger social transformation questions, you know, while having the kind of feminist anti-patriarchal and heteronormative lens on this - which we've also seen here and some other parts of the world you know which- which I wonder - sorry - I wonder if there's something which would be interesting to compare in terms - in generational terms of feminists in different parts of the world and what the sort of legacies of certain kinds of feminisms happen transnationally over decades.

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NAA: Definitely I mean you know what comes to mind is in Turkey right now I don't know if you saw the pictures that was actually in the New York Times on the front page, International Women's Day this year, tens of thousands of women marching in Istanbul in a context where the state does not tolerate any kind of protest, cracking down brutally on any kind of opposition the women were out there you know? And you know I think think in terms of shift the generation also the Turkish feminist movement is so interesting because until quite recently, Turkish feminists were quite camalist in the sense that there was sort of a tearing to a very linear idea of modernization and progress and secularism and their very nationalist sort of this kind of Turkish Republic, and yeah the women and the Kurdish women are oppressed because of their culture not seeing you know the the structural issues with the Turkish state. But I think a combination of Kurdish women's rights activists systematically challenging that narrative but also this new generation being exposed to transnational feminist ideas has really shifted. So any kind of major protest or demonstration in Turkey you would have Turkish women shouting Kurdish slogans and right now I would argue it's feminists in Turkey who are the forefront of challenging authoritarianism while much of the left and opposition has been silenced.

CTM: Yeah.

NAA: So yes but I guess in terms of the question of looking comparatively at generations I think the other thing we see through, how everything has become so polarized because while we have this in the Middle East that is you know, sort of young generation or new generation of feminists who are you know, refusing to engage in single issue campaigns and you see the issue of

feminism and you know patriarchy linked to all these other struggles. But at the same time of course you have new generation of Islamist and you know and conservative and people who totally buy into neoliberalism. So what I feel is it's becoming extremely polarized and that is not - and that cuts across - I think I see that you know in Europe, I think in North America, in the Middle East and I'm sure it's also similar in other contexts this extreme polarization.

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CTM: Yeah.

LEC: Rather than working to, recognizing the tensions and in some levels trying to work through those tensions, it's almost like in median.

NAA: Yeah I mean I don't want to hark back - I mean I certainly what I don't want to go back is sort of reproduce the binary between secular and religious. Because you know, that there are - I see it as a continuum - it's not that I mean I think that I see it much more the kind of right-wing, fascist, conservatism cuts across secular and religious. I mean - you know for instance in the Iraqi context, one of my PhD students wanted to study the sort of differences between secular and religious feminist movements and that is not sort of the main dividing line. But there are sort of other political divisions. So yeah I mean, so on one level I think that we, you know Turkey is another example where historically, there was a big division between the kind of camalist secular feminists and then we have the Kurdish women and then the sort of more religious Islamic feminist. And you know there is sort of cooperation and one big - I think one big thing is what sort of unites people is the relationship to authoritarianism, and you know that does unite people across secular and religious, positions or their adherence to avoid it as well.

CTM: Does authoritarianism, the way you were talking about it also link to levels of gender violence?

NAA: Absolutely.

CTM: Okay and and so then....

NAA:: I think there is a strong relationship, yes. Authoritarianism Militarization of societies and gender based violence has a very close link.

CTM: Which then makes sense in terms of the collaborations among and in between those various groups of feminist women, yeah.

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LEC: I wanted to get to some of the challenges, you know, that you have encountered in some

of the organizations that you've worked with and you pointed to some already and some of the personal challenges meaning, you know when we get by ourselves or with another colleague we talk about the kinds of intense problems and tensions that are inside of the organization. So what are some of those challenges what do they look like for you in that work?

NAA: Right well I mean, some of the challenges that I've encountered both in organizations or groups that I studied and also have been involved with revolve around, well, the fact that there's a kind of this kind of mixing of friendship and politics and that then creates an intensity that on the one level gives lots of pleasure and intimacy and trust, but by the same token can sort of easily sort of flip and then it becomes like this big - then it it's sort of a political difference but a personal drama or falling out so I think that is something that is universal, you know it's not culturally relevant thing.

CTM: No, not at all.

NAA: So I've seen that. Then…

CTM: So do you think that has to do with the fact that within feminist communities we haven't paid enough attention to what it really means to have relationships with each other. Which are really about having some ethical things in common. So because part of why those things happen I think is that people also assert power. In ways they are not even conscious of doing. So I've often thought we haven't created some of the cultures that we need to create where, you know, where those personal kind of dramas and splits don't then end up destroying the political project itself.

LEC: we're thinking of something we have in common so im listening and I'm thinking, yeah there's that but there's something else. And there's something else, or there's some other things. A couple of the other things I can think of is that we don't have shared goals, and aspirations, and we start out thinking that we do.

CTM: So we haven't clarified them.

LEC: We haven't clarified that and the clarification requires difficult moving through.

NAA: In terms of your point of not clarifying what your goals are, I agree but I also think that my experience... these goals might shift more in the process, and so then it's not so much we might have started, because yeah I am thinking of one organization you know we started it was very clear goal - goals against sanctions at the same time raising consciousness about you know the atrocities of Saddam Hussein but you know as the situation developed and also as we were kind of exposed to so many different things you know, we kind of started to move into different

directions. And we kind of failed to communicate that properly and then you know the question is, what are the so-called red lines in terms of what still holds us together, you know and at some point I mean that group fell apart because there was some women who after following the invasion, were very much supporting the resistance in Iraq, the armed resistance, or the insurgents who was, killing not just you know American soldiers - we can have a debate around that's you know, whether that's okay or not - but they were also killing Iraqi police and interpreters and innocent civilians in a marketplace, so you know then, I mean, one of my most difficult political moments in my life was actually The World Tribunal on Iraq in Istanbul, Arundhati Roy was the chair of the jury and it was sort of a big event of Capri Palace, three hundred people in the audience mainly sort of Turkish left but people had been invited from all over the world and it was three days of providing witness or evidence about the impact of the invasion occupation, and so I was asked to speak about the impact of the occupation on women and gender relations. I was on the last day. And every day I was listening to other people who had been invited either starting or finishing their talk: 'we have to support the armed resistance against U.S. imperialism'. So, I was so excited because, I mean I was just starting my PhD and - no that's not true I already finished my PhD at the time - but I was on the panel with Samir Amin who's work I had read as a graduate student - I thought 'wow I'm on the panel with Samir Amin'. Ayse Gul Altinay, who's a Turkish feminist anti-militarist scholar, was chiaring the panel, and there were a couple other people. So after I gave my talk I said I have to say that I cannot stand in front of you and say 'we have to support the armed resistance against U.S. imperialism' because right now as we speak that resistance is killing innocent Iraqis and I-I think we have to you know be a bit more - speak about resistance in the more qualified manner. As I was saying this Samir Amin jumped up and said 'This is not the time to be divisive!' And I felt hated by three hundred people in the room, you know who I mean all the comments are very negative and attacking me. I mean, there was some people afterwords who came to me and said 'oh thank you for mentioning this' but no one…

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CTM: And they only do that quietly unfortunately.

NAA: And it was really - I mean I was still quite sort of young, you know I mean I have given political talks before but it was daunting and, aside from I guess giving me a few layers of thicker skin I mean - I wrote an article afterwards which I called "The Enemy of My Enemy is Not Necessarily My Friend".

CTM: Yes.

NAA: And that's been kind of my position you know why, and I feel like that's one of my frustrations, you know with the left and the west that you know in the name of anti-imperialism

they seem so caught up in this narrative that they seem to gloss over...

CTM: A whole bunch of stuff. No absolutely. Yeah.

NAA: So I don't know how I got there but..

CTM: Well about the challenges... That's a very vivid, actually, description of what happens when politics, you know all the people the right political position is framed in very particular narrow always and when consensus is assumed. So that any time you come from a position where you're challenging it then - and I mean I also just think the whole notion - somebody like this person who is such a major scholar who's you know, older leaping up and saying that back to me is also very gendered spectacle.

NAA: Yes of course it was.

CTM: So that's important it seems to me. Yeah. So what then - you know we talked a lot and I think that the way we all sustain ourselves is by building collectives and alliances and solidarites across all kinds of different borders right? So how would you talk about what we need to do at this point you know across...

LEC: All those divides.

CTM: Divides to create because... at some level it's clearly the case that we need these solidarities because it's almost impossible these days given the way capital and neoliberalism and international governments institutions run, which is all run internationally, we have to figure out ways to build these.

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NAA: To be honest if I actually knew the answer to that question then you know I think I don't but I can tell you what my kind of mini-solution was in the sort of specific context, which was the context of wanting to do something concrete in the Iraqi context where I was touch with on the one hand female academics who were very interested in developing women and gender studies in Iraqi higher education. At the same time I was connected with Iraqi activists. And so you know they sort of all looked to me you know 'can you help us' and I thought 'okay so what in that situation, what can I do to make a difference?' Aside from trying to write articles to raise awareness, I thought 'I need to do something else'. So what I thought I could do was, on the one hand, I managed to raise some funding to bring academics from the region who had been - have been involved in women and gender studies who have a history of women and gender studies, for instance, the women gender studies at Birzeit University in Palestine, Ramallah, or in Cairo or you know in Beirut to... to create a space that the Iraqi academics can talk to the academics in

the region who have already been involved. And that was really successful I mean - I think that's - and it wasn't just in terms of the Iraqi academics benefiting from the experiences I mean the other academics from other countries were so interested and amazed to hear experiences of Iraqis. There hasn't - there wasn't so much contact and exchange before. The other thing so I you know, sort of organized the series of meetings and the counters and so we had to be creative, 'where can we meet where it's safe' so sometimes in Amman, in Beirut, in Iraqi Kurdistan. The other thing that I was sort of trying to facilitate was to bring Iraqi activists and Iraqi academics together who are interested in issues around gender equality and gender-based justice. So the activists that I was meeting they would tell me 'anecdotally, I know that this has had an impact on gender-based violence or you know there's this happening in society but I don't have any means to provide some evidence-based research that might help me then to have an impact in terms of policy' you know or awareness raising. So we did - what we tried to do was to put together activist and academics to think around you know what kind of research is needed to address what kind of sort of practical question that emerge out of activism, and what kind of methods are needed to obtain you know the kind of finding that would address a question and what do you do then with that. And so, actually one big element of that was trying to develop qualitative research skills, because unfortunately Iraq, as in many countries in the Middle East there's, there is this very strong positivist bias and for reasons sort of linked to political authoritarianism I guess you know it wasn't really possible to do much empirical qualitative research. So you know we kind of engaged in several projects where we tried to bring people together. So that was kind of - I felt that, rather than me bringing in people from the UK and Germany and the US, which is the usual, I thought what I can do is facilitate and mediate while also, you know I mean I'm not saying that I didn't - I have certain, I guess experiences or skills that I felt I could share but that it was much more about facilitating encounters that I thought would be beneficial, and, you know, would lead to cooperation and solidarity across... And I think... moving forward I think it would be really great if there would be more of these encounters but also, you know across—I mean for instance I have a colleague at SOAS, Awino Okech, from Kenya and you know we've organize the workshop where we brought feminist scholars and activist from different African context and from the Middle East context together.

CTM: Different kinds of dialogues.

NAA. Yeah I think that is good but the other, I mean, important thing instead of generation, I think to have sort of more cross generational - and yes I mean I do also think it's important to bring more men in but then you know.. one has to be very picky with the kind of men you bring in. *[Laughter]*

CTM: I think it's fine to have feminist men.

NAA: Yes well no I mean of the feminist men I do feel bad I mean one of the sources of hope...

LEC: Where are those?

CTM: There are a few.

NAA: But you know one of my - yeah. In connection to the Middle East is actually one source of hope, is the fact that there are more and more young men who say 'well actually gender based equality and Injustice is not a side issue'. It is the vision my vision for a less authoritarian more democratic better society that has to be at the center. That's new and that's good.

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CTM: Yeah. right. That's really progressive.

LEC: And so where does that come from?

NAA: Well I mean… it comes from I think partly realizing that patriarchy is bad for men as well, because you know who are the people in power it's not just men it's old men, you know of certain - whatever context a certain ethnic or religious background or specific class. So realizing that you know also men realizing that there some intersection dimension to it and that's one, and secondly I think that, in the context of the various protest movements and processes in the region of the last three years to actually see how women have been targeted and to recognize that that is not some haphazard thing, but that's the authoritarian state fighting back. I think that's you know in places like Egypt and Tunisia that's been very much, you know obvious.

CTM: That's wonderful.

LEC: thats hopeful.

CTM: Thats a fabulous note to end on actually

LEC: That's really exciting. Because some worlds that some of us live in you know we're still struggling with conscientizing patriarchal women.

NAA: They exists everywhere. They exist very much in the Middle East as well.

CTM: Right, right.

Feminist Freedom Warriors

LEC: This is really… hopeful. This possibility.

CTM: Absolutely. Thank you. This was really

LEC: Insightful.

CTM: And generative. It's making me think about stuff which is always a good thing. I'm looking forward to having you in class tomorrow. On Wednesday.

NAA: Wednesday yep. Thank you.

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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.