Paula Johnson

11/17/21

[00:00:14]

LEC: So today is the 17th of November.

PJ: Yes.

LEC: And again, welcome.

CTM: 2021.

LEC: That's important.

CTM: Yes, it is! [*Laughter*.] It's true.

PJ: It's easy to lose track, let me tell you [*Laughs.*]

CTM: Yeah, pandemic times and all. So we'll start by asking what brought you to feminist work and the kind of feminist work you're doing now, the activist work along with your activism in the academy.

PJ: So, first of all, let me say how glad I am to participate and congratulate you on the project. I remember when you started it, I remember the book when it was published and then all of the interviews that you've done thus far. So I'm really happy to participate in this and be a part of it.

What brought me to feminist work? I think was consciousness ... growing up about identity and place in the world. I grew up in a family of Black women ad I saw those women in all kinds of positions in the society and not always being recognized for just how just how smart they were, frankly. Not because of formal education, I mean there's some degree of that too ... but the ways in which they moved in the world and what they gave to us ... so we were always aware of our history. We were always aware, not just of the men in Black history, but also of the women. I was just imbued with that sense, now that didn't necessarily have to translate into activism, but for me

it did. I think I had a foundation for being offended really with any type of injustice any sense of sexism. So I have always tried to operate in a way that was the fullness of the human being for myself and for others. That's what took me into activism and advocacy. So my work on different causes, it's always been important to me to focus on women and women's lives.

CTM: So do you remember, for instance, growing up any particular instances where this kind of sense of injustice or offense really hit you, which propelled you to think that, well, this is wrong and we need to do something.

PJ: Yeah, well I think college years were formative. I was in school in the, what? Late seventies, early eighties. And there was a lot of feminist moments at the time and the places where I was in Washington DC and neighboring Maryland and College Park, there was a lot of feminist activism there. So, movements became a part movements and marches ... one of the things I like to say about having grown up in Washington was that ALL movements came through—

CTM: Through D.C.?

PJ: —yeah. And, we were part of those things. So, as there were feminist marches that came, we became a part of those things. So it was informative and formative for me to see women advocating and being literally on the streets. That was all complimented with what was going on for me on campus as well, being active in student movements there, ensuring that women were part of everything that went on. I was part of Black student organizations, as well as women's organizations, and bringing those things together. So where there were instances where women's voices were excluded or we weren't part of activities—we protested. We protested those things and made sure that we were there. I was always a writer as well, so my writing always focused on women's lives and Black women's lives in particular. One of the things that especially I suppose, moved me was violence against women. I was very active in the domestic violence movement, physical violence, sexual violence. I did that in a grassroots way before I went into law per se, but I did it on that level too. But I spent a lot of time working in the domestic violence movement in shelters, spending time overnight in the shelters and advocating on every level. So those things raised a lot of my consciousness about the ways in which women were treated in the society. And recognizing that in many of those violence or anti-violence movements around women, that they did not typically consider women of color. Black women weren't always considered about the ways in which violence occurred and affected us. So, that was a part of my consciousness too. That where we were talking about violence in women's lives, that we had to talk about the particularities with respect to Black women's lives and other women of color. So those things really were a part of the ways in which I saw the importance of the value of women's lives and being able to just live ... the right to live free of violence, free of abuse, and how that extended into so many other areas where women were treated in disparate ways, unfair ways. And

violence can take many forms. It isn't just physical. There's the violence of the economy, there's the violence of being treated unfairly in so many ways. So all of that became part of my consciousness and my activism.

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LEC: Were there moments in your family's history ... because this sounds like really collective work, that came out of collectivity. I'm thinking in a similar way in Canada. So you were propelled into certain things because you were in college and you were doing this kind of work, and it was a sense of collective struggle and collective fight back about social injustice. What was happening with you as a young Black woman in your family? Was that endorsed, supported? Or was it like a case like me, where it was ... that's what gave me force to push forward from within?

PJ: Yeah, I think it was a mixed bag. I think at the same time that there was encouragement in the family. I think there was also some degree of reticence, some concern. Some of that, I think, was concern about me. I was very headstrong, I just was very headstrong and I can recall my mother saying--she tells a story for instance about sometime ... admonishing me for something, and she said she could see herself talking to me. And I was looking at her, just looking at her very intently. And she told me, she said she knew as she saw me looking back at her that I was gonna make up my own mind. She could just tell, it's kind of like ... family lore that I had a mind of my own. Not that I wouldn't listen or anything, but people just knew in the family that I was kind of self directed in that way. So in that respect in the family, as much as I saw strength and independence of the women in my family, I could also see aspects of gender stereotypes in the family. And those were the kinds of things that I would chafe against. So that's why I say mixed bag, and people live with, I guess, contradictions or the fullness of their beings, but I recognized those things and made decisions for me, how I wanted to be in the world.

PJ: And again, I admired and respected the women in my family, but at the same time where there were some aspects of ways in which they lived their own lives that I didn't want for me, and so that was collected. [*inaudible 00:11:06*] Yes. Yes. I would say so, and for me also, there's a matter of sexuality and that was something that I came to fully appreciate about myself and my coming out process and all of those things ...

CTM: Also around college days or earlier?

PJ: More or less, well, I would say it was burgeoning but came to fruition around college days. In my twenties ... I made a decision, once I made that acknowledgement to myself, I recognized myself to myself that I was going to live my life, I mean, fully and openly. And that has been part of my struggle, that has been part of my struggle. That's been part of my activism for people to be able to live their whole lives. That is

part of the recognition too. Now I will say, back to your question, Linda ... that was not fully embraced in my family. Far from it, there were times, during which my family and I were estranged because of it, because I really had to make a decision that no one blood related, not blood related, no one has a right to make someone else feel less anything or anyone. Some of it is my own arrogance and I say, arrogance, in this sense, that I have a right. I was not going to be treated less than anyone on any basis. Now I done a lot of race based activism, lot of gender based activism. And when it all came together with sexuality as well ... none of those parts of my identity took a second seat to the others. It was really about being the most self actualized person that I could be, and to want that for everybody else. I mean my whole activism ... it's not just about me, it's about everyone should have that opportunity in their lives. I want to be part of making that possible or helping that to be possible for people.

[00:12:35]

CTM: So do you think that's part of what took you into law?

PJ: Yes, I do ... as I was saying, I became aware, just of the dynamics of domestic violence. And once I began to see it, I just saw how it's tentacles were running throughout the community and there wasn't talk about it. There wasn't talk about it in families there, wasn't talked about it in the community. And I thought this silence, to borrow another phrase--this silence was killing us--that was adopted by the AIDS movement, HIV and AIDS, but this silence was also killing us because women in our families, women in our communities who were Black and perhaps, particularly because they were Black, did not feel as though there was a space to talk about what they were experiencing, because all of the racism in every institution, in our society, so that I didn't want to compound that by talking about violence, that was often at the hands of Black men. But they were being hurt. There's that line from Pat Parker's poem, she says "that system that you hit me with was a left hook" This is what was going on. So, if our whole community was to be healthy, we had to address the violence that was taking place in it. We couldn't just ignore it or pretend that it wasn't occurring ... those things hurt. Now the fact that we might survive them does not mean that they aren't paying for. So we've got to acknowledge that. So all that was a part of it. I did grassroots work. I was part of domestic violence organizations.

And as I said, I worked in the, shelters and volunteered in the shelters. But I also decided I wanted to have other venues, I suppose, where I could do the work. And I thought that law was going to be one of those avenues to do this work. And so I was an advocate in the criminal justice system. I did prosecutions of special cases domestic violence and rape cases. After leaving that work, I just continued to be involved ... I don't know if you'll go into this, but let me just say, one of the offshoots from this was that and one of the book that I've written it's called *Inner Lives: Voices of African American Women in Prison* and what I say in the introduction in *Inner*

Lives is that when I was doing the work in the criminal justice system, I saw that the same women coming and going, the same women who were coming in as suspects or defendants were also the same women who were being victimized by the violence, so that told me that there is something quite fundamental about this, that it really isn't about, who is a wrongdoer, who's a victim, the violence affecting the women. It's the kind of thing that for many of them was leading them into issues and problems in the criminal justice system. So if we dealt with the nub, if we dealt with the violence, we wouldn't be having these issues of women in the prison. So again, making the connections and that's what led me to do much of that work as well.

LEC: So for that book, when you went to the prisons ... of course you were doing data collection ...you had already figured that out then and it was confirmed with those women.

PJ: Absolutely, yeah.

LEC: And what did you think, or did you think something needs to happen in a transformative way about the justice system?

PJ: Yeah, well, again, the transformation or the transformative aspect of things is that the criminal justice system is a very blunt and ineffective instrument to deal with these societal harms. Yeah. Especially as it relates to women's lives. So that if you incarcerate the women, what does that mean? Not only to them, but also to families. Right. Because so many of the women in prison are parents. In many instances, they're single parents and they're single parents of minor children. And so the family can be devastated just by the incarceration of one person, especially if that person is a woman and a mother. And so yes, I was aware of that. What I wanted to do in that piece was to provide the data. So in the book there's data and empirical information and there's legal analysis and all of that. But to me, the most important part of *Inner Lives* are the narratives of the women. It was my effort to do something comprehensive ... a comprehensive treatment of the issue. To bring all of these voices and perspectives to bear.

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So in that book, I talked to women in prisons, I went to prisons, maximum security, minimum, medium ... people who were in halfway houses so they were making the transition back into the community. I talk to wardens, I talk to judges, parole officers, and I talk to family members to get everybody's perspective. Children, adult children ... to get all of the perspectives that I could on this singular matter, how did it affect you? I would ask the women, for instance, we know why you're here, like on paper. We know the charges and the sentence. But how do you explain why you're here? How you got here in your life ... and the women would talk about things like when they were younger. The abuse that they experienced, physical, sexual abuse, those

things often would lead to truancy. So they weren't going to school. It would often lead to self medication. They started to abuse alcohol and drugs, all of those things. So that's why I say, if we deal with those matters, we will not have these populations. And I think this goes for men and women, frankly, we won't have those issues. Employment issues ... just all of the sexist and abusive treatment that they would experience trying to live in these United States. So the most important part of it was what the women said about their own lives. They understood it. They understood it and they understood the whole system, too. So that to me was incredible. There were some just beautiful exchanges. It may seem odd to describe it like that, but the time talking to the women in the prison and it took al--it was not easy getting in, it's not easy getting into some of these institutions. I remember for instance prisoners or inmates, they have jobs in the prison, and sometimes they're in administrative positions. So you've got to do your IRB proposal and get permission and you've got to do it for the university.

You've gotta do it for each institution to get in there. So I was like steeped in paperwork to try to get into the prisons [*Laughs.*]. But I recall for instance, going into one institution and I got there and you go through the office you meet the officials and that kind of thing. I remember one of the women saying to me, Black woman, cause it was about Black women, I remember one of the women saying to me "we are so glad you got here, because ..." she said, "we have seen other researchers, white, ask for permission to come into this institution and we've seen their applications, their proposals, and they have never been as extensive as yours" but this place kept asking me for more more information, "say something else" whatever it is, every time it came back, I would send it back. In response, in, in response to the request. Now little did I know, the women were aware of this. Cause the title of my book was *Inner Lives: Voices of Black Women in Prison.* And so they knew it I didn't know that they saw like all of this was happening. And so finally there were no more nos [*Laughs.*] and so I get there and the women say to me, "we are so glad that you stuck with it." they didn't think it was gonna happen! They did not think it was gonna happen. One woman said--cause I asked them--much, like you asked me, why did you wanna participate in this project? And more than one woman said, we didn't believe anybody cared about us, our story, Black women in prison. We didn't think that that was really the project, and that you are a Black woman coming to talk about Black women's lives. I said, "well, that is all it's about." And so we would laugh, we would laugh about that. But those things told me how important it was to do that. At the time that *Inner Lives* came out, there were very few books that focused on Black women.

[00:23:28]

CTM: When did it come out?

PJ: This was '98 or '99, something like that. Yeah. And it was several years in the process, cause there was a lot of travel, lot of transcripts. And if I could just say one other thing about it ... what made it, what really made it so whole was the photographs as well. I mean you two know that I'm a photographer and I just tried to bring everything I could to this project including that space for the women's voices. And so for those women who agreed--this was another struggle getting my cameras inside of the prisons--but for those women who agreed there were pictures because I wanted their faces as well as their voices to be a part of this because seeing faces meant, nobody could say we don't recognize those women, they have to see their faces too. And say, that looks like somebody in my family, in my community, in my society, and we could no longer say it doesn't exist, they don't exist. So I really try to put everything that I could bring to that project, in that book.

CTM: So interesting because that project to me is it's such a deeply feminist project because it is humanizing and making visible a whole group of people that has been completely erased. Because prison is this place where people go and then they're gone.

PJ: Right.

CTM: Not only can they not vote and stuff, but they're invisible to the larger population. So even just, even that act of thinking—

PJ: —and the prisons are so far away!

CTM: Yeah. Right.

PJ: Women, they get the least amount of visitors. Now what we see the converse is not true. We see women going through many hoops to go see the men in their lives in prisons, but we don't see the visitors, not partners, not family members and and most to the chagrin of the women, the children. It's very hard. Now, some of that has changed, but by and large, it's still true. The prisons are far away. Yeah. and so those things...the multiple meanings of *Inner Lives* is like the inside lives of the women—

CTM: —but also the inside the prison—

PJ: —inside the prison, and prison walls are also invisible. Because it doesn't always have to be the physical institution, those prison walls exist all in the society. So I had all of those meanings attached too.

CTM: So that's so interesting. So if you look at your kind of journey from that place, through all of the different projects that you've initiated, that you've been involved in...talk a little bit about that. So where and how do you carry some of that through some of the work now that you've done over the last couple of decades?

PJ: Well, it really comes from the same source Chandra. As I think about this, the focus might change to some degree but it all comes from the same place. It really comes from this place where there's something inviolate about our beings and when somebody tries to violate it ... that's a place where I want to be. To protest it, to raise my voice or to raise my voice with other people.To be on the street with them...it's all the same source really. And I think if injustice offends you, then you're gonna do something about it.

[00:28:00]

LEC: Absolutely.

PJ: Wherever it exists. I mean, because your question alludes to work, I've done in the United States work, I've done abroad, I do consider myself a child of the diaspora. So anti-apartheid activism ... all kinds of activism throughout the African diaspora. And again, as it relates to women's lives and LGBTQ people's lives. Everybody's lives, wherever that happens that people are denigrated, threatened, killed, dismissed, that's the work that we all have to be part of. And I want to be a part of it. One example I'll give you an example, again, this is from some years ago, decades, really ... but at the height of the HIV aids crisis I was in Massachusetts. I was living in Boston at the time. And at the early 80's everybody's frightened about HIV. What people were beginning to understand about it was it was mostly, white gay men who were contracting the virus and nobody knew much of anything, but people knew to be scared because they just didn't have the information about how it was transmitted and all that stuff. But from the very beginning, HIV and AIDS had a disproportionate impact on the lives of people of color. Hetero, gay people of color, women, for various reasons, to drug users, so the use of needles but including LGBT people of color. But no one was talking about that. Nobody was going into our neighborhoods. And so at the time in Boston, there was a organization started by white gay men. It was called AIDS Action, the AIDS Action Committee, AAC. And so a number of us who were gay folks of color said, "we need to be part of this". Because we knew our communities were suffering, Latinx and Black communities. And because what happened at the time was that Massachusetts began to funnel monies into AAC to address how to serve people. Medically, socially, all kinds of services. We didn't see that those things were reaching our communities, especially impoverished communities, the whole gamut. So our group formed a committee within AAC to say, if you're really gonna be an arm of the state, we have to make sure that our communities are getting those resources too. And there was a lot of conflict around that. Between how a lot of the white gay folks felt that people of color were homophobic. And of course there were homophobic people of color. Like there were homophobic white folks. But there are lots of discussions and issues surrounding that. And we were like, look then that's the work to be done. So we were talking, we were talking all around the Boston, Cambridge area and across Massachusetts, frankly. And we made a decision that when we would go to speak to groups, like we'd go to

Black churches, Latinx churches, all over the place, white places, predominantly white places ... that there, we would not just talk of about HIV in one community. We would always include people of color and people of color who were gay so that no one could leave that place, not knowing the gamut of how this was affecting folks. Because you don't ever know who's in the audience. You never know, there could be somebody there. And if they don't hear that this could pertain to them too, you would have left that place and they would not have been helped or told about resources. So that's the kind of work that I have been a part of to insist that no matter where we are, that we are there. No matter what space we are there.

LEC: Well, as I listen to you now, I'm thinking the field you are in, law, which seems to be in this country—and particularly at this moment—one of the most rigid social institutions...with so much power that can affect particular kinds of change, that it's one of the slowest moving for those of us from the outside, who are activists, and look at this, and we see women languishing in prison ... it makes me wonder ... the kind of activist you have been, in reflecting on your life as a feminist over the last couple decades in particular ... how do you hope, how do you see your work contributing or how do you hope it has contributed to sustain change in women's lives?

[00:33:48]

PJ: Well, I've been teaching for a number of years. I've been practicing for a number of years. And my hope is that the people who come into contact with me and to whom I come into contact, understand the type of lawyer and lawyering that I do. That it is about, in some instances changing systems. In some instances, dismantling systems, but far from maintaining the status quo. And that, for instance, when I talk to students I tell them about the power that they are going to have for better worse. Lawyers have this position in society where they can enter into spaces where everyone cannot enter. And I talk about the responsibility that comes with having that entree and once you know these things, right you have a responsibility to act in that way, not to maintain these systems of oppression. You can use law in ways that can improve people's lives, help people. And that was my motivation for getting into it. And I recognize, it's no panacea for sure, and it can be slow moving. And you can do it on many different levels. You can work with individuals and make a profound impact on a person's life. That's, a lot of what trial lawyers do for instance. Or you can do law reform work, you can work with organizations who are trying to change things legislatively, you can work inside of a system. You can work outside of a system. And what I say to folks is you need to be in every one of those spaces, but be very intentional and clear about why you're there, what your purpose is, what you are trying to do. If you are just another cog in the wheel then you're not helping things to move, right? You're not creating change. But if you are there because you see a need for things to be different, and you want to be part of that then that can make things very transformative in our society. I think law, as with many other movements, social movements, feminist

movements, racial, LGBT movements, sometimes you go forward and you go back back. I like to say to students and anybody else, the struggle is long. It's not linear, but it is long. And if you think that a setback means that you have a right to be discouraged and to quit, then you really need to look at the folks from once we came. I take students like in this area, I take them to where Harriet Tubman's house and where her grave site is. They need to know she lived, this is not just a name in a book. Now what if Harriet Tubman had said, "oh few folks said they didn't wanna come"

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CTM: Yeah, so I'm depressed.

PJ: Yeah, I'm depressed. I don't mean to make light of that. I'm just saying we cannot stop. We simply cannot stop. Law is absolutely imperfect, even law and as I teach it, showing the ways in which in fact law has promoted so much injustice in the U.S. I teach a course called Race and Law. It's an interdisciplinary and intersectional course. And it shows the way the law itself has perpetuated these harms. So our business has got to be about undoing it and creating something new. We don't even have to just dismantle things. We've got to see a new way. And so I ask my students, in fact, I ask my students in class yesterday talking about a case and I said, what would your ruling be in this case? You say you don't like what the court did, you are gonna be the judge soon enough, what would your ruling be? They have to think about that because that is real. That is real. So those are the ways I am often—more often than not—dissatisfied with the law. But I don't stop. I don't think you have to be in love with the law to recognize the importance and the power of it. That's where I come from. How can I use it in a way that I think is beneficial to the people that I care about. That is really the only reason I'm in it. It's not the only way in which I do my activism. It's one part of it. We talk about being scholar-activists, a lawyer-activist. Whatever you're doing, I don't think you should be a one trick pony. I think you should see that you might be needed in some other areas and be versatile in that way to do whatever work is needed. And so for me, one of them is law, another one of them is writing. Another one of them is art protest. I mean, all of those things, I like to think I can bring to bear in a situation and try to communicate what is important about it.

CTM: So I'm listening to all this and I'm thinking, okay, so the way I would describe how you see the law and your own work, and what you've been trying to do your entire life ... it's like crossing all kinds of borders. Refusing to be put in a certain box, you're a lawyer, this is what you do. You're a scholar, this is what you do. And teaching your students the same, that is you have to be present everywhere. You have to witness everywhere. So what do you think then given like the culture we live in given the profound individualism, the kind of commodified culture. That is about celebrities and doing this and that, what do you think are some of the real deep challenges to get people that we work with, especially our students, because we are all teachers here ... to in fact, both see those borders and boundaries and have the

courage and the smarts and the ethics to decide. We have to cross these in order to do work that is meaningful. That's not just related to our own narrow sense of who we are as individuals or in our narrow communities.

LEC: And especially in fields like law, where it is so celebrated. It is so much about money. It's got accumulation of profits at the heart of it. Where are those people, how do you find them? How do you manage the challenges? And sustaining, not yourself as an individual, but what has it meant for your goals? Have those challenges have they interrupted your goals?

[00:42:09]

PJ: Well the work is not finished, so I'm still in it. But I guess a couple of ways that I would respond; one is in terms of how I do the teaching itself. And that is whether I'm doing a large class or a smaller one. I describe the time that we're together in that semester, in that class, as as our community ... that's our community for that time that we are together. And there are rules that we have to observe in the community in terms of mutual respect, the ways in which you talk to someone. There are reciprocal responsibilities of the person who speaks and the person who listens. The person who speaks has to be very cognizant, not only of what they're saying, but how they're saying it. The person who listens has a reciprocal responsibility to make sure that they are hearing what the person is saying and not misconstruing it. Especially not deliberately misconstruing it or turning it around, in some sort of way. So we set some rules, some guidelines for how we are gonna operate each of my classes every semester, that's how we start. And so even people who are not inclined to think of the learning experience that way want to be part of the community. It isn't about everyone agreeing, but it is about everyone being honest in that space about what they're saying and how they're doing it. I also constantly tell them about the responsibilities they have in this profession. I bring in the examples of injustices that were brought about by lawyers now, a lot of people--and sure this is true to a large extent--but a lot of people will talk about the state side of things, especially the prosecutors. But I like to tell them, and it goes back to *Inner Lives* that defense attorneys have a lot to answer for as well. Talking to some of the women, they would say to me on very serious charges, they say, "I met my lawyer in the morning"—most likely at arraignment and before lunch—"they were telling me to plead out to years of incarceration" and the the women would say, "and they didn't ask me anything, they got whatever information the state was giving them, but they never asked me anything".

So I say to the students, particularly those who say to me that they want to be defense council, I say, so you have to deal with this too. It's all of that that I tried to make them understand. You all know that I direct a Cold Case Justice Initiative, this is all of a piece too because in those situations where the students and I are investigating unsolved, racially motivated crimes--primarily from the civil rights era--the students are constantly saying, we didn't know anything about this. We didn't know, we didn't

know anything about this. So they're learning, they're learning the history of their society through the violence that was perpetrated against these Black people's lives. They were killed. There was no investigation, they were disappeared. There was no search or investigation into what happened to them. And so now decades later, we are still trying to get answers for these families and these communities that makes it very real for them, especially when they meet the family members of some of the victims of these crimes.

I can tell you that it has moved students to tears sometimes when they talk to the sons and daughters and relatives of somebody who was killed by Klan violence in the United States. To know that nobody's ever been held accountable for those things, and that this is the work that we are doing. So I get some hope from the fact that these things affect them in such a way. Now, I do hasten to add to the students you can have a visceral response and you should, because if you didn't feel something, then I'd be concerned in another way. But it can't be just about what you feel, cause they are still coming to us for our expertise. So what should fuel you is that you should be incensed about this, that this could happen to somebody else. On the basis of race, whatever the basis is, right. Racially motivated crimes that happen in this country ... and it's an untold number. We're still discovering cases. We're seeing cases today. I always like to say that the cold cases of tomorrow are these cases that are happening today, today. So we are dealing with all that and the students begin to understand it. I've had students who came to law school, said they wanted to do corporate law. And then they volunteered with the Cold Case Project and they just changed their trajectory altogether. They will say this too, "I thought I was going to do--my dream was to be in-house council, some corporation" and fine, fine, if that's your dream, "but the experience that we've had, what I've seen, what I've learned, what I've done, how I've contributed ... I see myself doing this work now. Civil rights, human rights work, but I see myself just doing something else." Those are not unusual stories at all. And I say to the students, "all of you are not likely to do this work like forever, when you get out of law school. But you can still contribute in some way...you can do pro bono work. If you are that in-house council, somebody's gotta finance the movement, you can do that, but there are all kinds of ways. I mean, seriously, there are all kinds of ways to the work. And I think that once they become exposed to it, there is more hope that that can happen.

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CTM: But Paula, you're doing more than exposing them. I think what you're also doing pedagogically is you are creating the conditions for people to be accountable to each other and to the collective, we are doing this work together. They are doing this work with you. So in, in many ways that kind of modeling is a way of pushing back against some of this corporatized, individualist ways of thinking yeah. About what it means to be doing lawyering yeah. Or whatever. So it's what we in different languages and different disciplines would call really decolonizing pedagogy. Which is so fundamental to people learning different ways of interacting and being

accountable and responsible to each other. Because without that, it it's almost like we then rely on the fact that we are saying these are good things to do, and those are bad things to do. So don't do the bad things, do the good things, but that doesn't work unless we create the conditions where people learn those things.

PJ: It's not didactic in that way either. I mean I have a sense of right and wrong but I'm not hitting anybody over the head with it. I'm allowing them to discover it through the material, through the discourse, through what happens. I just had a conversation the other day with students in my class, and this is in the criminal procedure class and , it's November, right. It's that time of the semester when everybody is exhausted and , we're trying to get to Thanksgiving and we're just tired. But we still have work to do, semester's not over yet. And so when I walked into the class it just hit me...before we just launch into the material, let me just acknowledge this. Because, I joke with them, we have a good rapport in that class. So I said to folks, “listen, how are you all doing?” I said, "I'm hearing some heavy sighs out there. I know you're tired, we all are, but listen. I want you to think back to when we first came in here and think about how much we have done. Semester's almost over, but think about how much we have done. And when this class is over, as it soon will be, this is what I would like for you to remember, not just what you learned from the professor, not just what you learned from the material, but what you learned from each other. Because if you take that away from here, then you know that people can talk across differences, different ideology, different points of view.” I have students often say to me, I don't like [*Laughs.*] I don't like that opinion. I'm like, you can't just say you don't like an opinion!

CTM: You have to give some evidence to—

PJ: —reason!

CTM: —actually support your [*inaudible 00:54:17*].

PJ: You don't like it because ... ? I say "so even if someone were to agree with you, you gotta say why." So then a student would say, "what part of it didn't make sense?" maybe there was some fallacious reasoning, whatever it was. In this event that's in my mind, the student just went on and on and on reasons [*Laughs.*] and then when he finished, I said, now I understand what it is you didn't like about it, now you have explained to me and everybody else. But in every class I teach, I don't care what the size of it is. Students have to work with each other. They either do stuff in pairs or they do stuff in groups. They do their own work, but they also have to work with somebody else in that setting.

CTM: Is that unusual in terms of legal pedagogy? Is that unusual? The things they're doing?

PJ: I think it's, yes. Fairly. Yeah. Yeah.

LEC: Surprising to us because it's very common in what we do

CTM: Yeah, and that's so interesting--

PJ: --I think it depends too

LEC: [overlapping speakers] …it works in that field. You keep people separated, get them isolated, you control their thinking more. And so they are trained to do that. Cause I'm listening to you and I'm thinking, wow, we have classes that blow up spaces. Pedagogical approach is all about being critical. Being challenging. Looking at everything around you as needing decolonization because the very thinking is about this, if not to end up with a bunch of students who can do the discussive work.

[00:54:37]

CTM: And they still conform, basically, because that's the easy way to go. So last question, because we are getting close to the thing. So … what to ask you? I have a lot of questions, Paula [*Laughs.*]. I mean, unfinished questions here, but maybe talk a little bit about the work that you have done sort of in different countries and with feminists in different situations across borders. What has been difficult about it and where has it led you?

LEC: And what kind of solidarity?

PJ: Right solidarity is really the key because, especially going across borders the United States has a certain position in the world ... rightly or wrongly, an outsized degree of influence and power and resources and all that stuff. So, when someone from the United States goes into certain spaces, either there can be skepticism, even distrust, and you can understand that. So you have to make sure that people understand you're coming in a space of solidarity. There is the reality that many folks in the United States just don't know about other people's in the world. And so I think that once I'm in a space like that, working with women's groups--

CTM: So what's an example, like where have you—

PJ: In South Africa, in Zimbabwe, for instance work in Ghana. In each of those spaces working to particularly identify where the women's issue and where the women's groups are. So for instance, in Ghana, I was part of a delegation there to look at issues around democratic institutions. And my focus was looking at women's groups there and so, they were women's collectives, cooperatives, that kind of thing. So, economic issues, as well as like legal and democratic institutions in Zimbabwe.

One of the programs that I created while at SU was the Law in Zimbabwe program, and it was one of the first programs where law students worked with human rights and public interest organizations, as opposed to, say, exchange programs where folks might be in a classroom and that kinda, they actually were working with these groups. We were working with different women's groups in Zimbabwe, working on domestic violence issues, working on economic issues. And so this, the students and I would be firmly ensconced within those groups. So those kinds of things were very, very important. I've worked with LGBT groups across--I'm part of international groups on LGBT rights, and that's an issue on the continent and in the diaspora. So some of my work involves those kinds of things.

CTM: And what would you say is sort of the future of doing that kind of work?

LEC: Or your vision of the kind of world you want, one based on the work you do?

PJ: It is a world where there is, solidarity across borders and across identities. I think it's important for people to recognize their own selves and to be secure in those selves and to have security in those selves. And having that allows you to also see where you can find commonality with other people and other people's struggles. I think that the future is in people coming together across many issues and identities and needs. Because so much of it transcends particular circumstances. So we need to know the particularities, but we also need to know how we do things together. There's such a bill of goods that people have been sold about the "other", cause for the most, we don't know about the "other". In my Race and Law class, people are, I mean, they're in their twenties, some even older, but they're in their twenties and there are things that they don't know about the history of this country, racial history.

[00:59:59]

LEC: That's kind of common

PJ: It is! Again, an interdisciplinary course. But they're in law school, learning these things for the first time to me, that's just abominable. I mean, what an indictment on the us education system ... that people would get to graduate school or professional school and not know these basic things. So what gives me some hope, I guess, encouragement, is that once they learn it, some of them are really angry, really angry that they didn't know this stuff. And I'm talking about students across the board, every race, ethnicity I mean they're just mad that it took this long for them to have this attention to these subject matters. When they do learn it, it, they develop a commitment to being different themselves. We've been having conversations in my class about, folks are nervous about going home because of the stuff we do in our class, and what kind of conversations they're gonna have. And I say, "look, you don't have to make it all happen at the Thanksgiving table, I want you to enjoy"—[*Laughs.*] but it's that kind of sensibility that they have now. Right. And wanting to right wrongs

or not tolerating some things that they might have heard growing up. Nobody challenged it. Nobody said anything about it or against it. And they are gung-ho now about doing something different. They're in a whole different place ... but it's that sense. So what I say to the folks ... the two "I" words, right? To say there's no "I" in team, but here's what I say in terms of the two "I" words that I like, and that is intention and integrity. That's the way to operate in the world. I don't care what you're doing. I don't care what field you are in. I don't care what work you do. It is, operate with intentionality. Don't just let things happen to you. You decide, you decide and do that work with integrity. The struggles that I have had, the fights ... you're all familiar, fights at this institution! I have done what I did because I was intentional about it. And I did it with integrity, win or lose, win or lose. Nobody would say that I did it for some other reason ... I did it because I thought it was the right thing to do. Standing up for students, the work we do in DK, at our own institution with picket signs saying "you cannot treat your own students this way" That's what I mean, by being offended by the injustice of it all, and in some ways just gratuitous violence. So we can stand with students. That's intentionality and that's integrity. And I think, if there's anything that my students learn from me besides what we do in the classroom is that I try to walk to walk.

CTM: Thank you. That's a fabulous place to end.

PJ: Thank you.

CTM: Thank you very much, Paula.

PJ: This was wonderful. Thanks.

[01:04:01 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.