

WORKSHOP: Global Feminisms in the Classroom *Introduction to Women's Studies*

Transcript Excerpts for Discussion

Definitions of Feminism

China site-Zhang Lixi

00:25:36 Feminism: Nuquan Zhuyi and Nuxing Zhuyi¹

Shi: You said a moment ago that you are a feminist (*nuquan zhuyizhe*). What does this term mean to you?

Zhang Li: This is a rather academic question. First we can talk about the problem of translation, especially of the term “feminism.” In fact in Chinese theoretical circles, the media and in everyday language there are two most common usages of feminism, *nuquan zhuyi* and *nuxing zhuyi*. When people translate these terms they have their own understandings of the concept and at the same time a certain identification with the concept. The translator’s understanding of the concept will undoubtedly be influenced by her environment. Again, at the same time she will have to identify with this concept. When translated, this word will not be value neutral. It represents your identification with this concept and its implied meanings. Actually, as early as the 1920s during the New Culture Movement,² this word was translated from western cultural theory. Some people called feminism *nuquan zhuyi* and others used the term *nuxing zhuyi*. However at that time this was not widely debated. It was not until the 1980s when many Chinese people came into contact with the theories of women’s studies. Many people coming back from overseas and China’s open door policy also allowed more and more people to come into contact with western theories. At this time everybody again started to discuss the translation of “feminism” (*nuquan zhuyi* and *nuxing zhuyi*). I think there are two rather distinct schools of thought. One group asserts that the Chinese term *nuquan zhuyi* more completely reflects the nature of the concept of “feminism” in the West. In addition to advocating the equality of the

¹Both terms can be translated as “feminism.” *Nuxing zhuyi* is literally “female-ism” or “feminine-ism.” This translation emerged in the early twentieth century but reemerged in the 1980s. Some believe that this term has less political but more biological connotations than *nuquan zhuyi*. *Nuquan zhuyi* is literally “woman-rights-ism” Since *quan* can mean both rights and power, the term can be interpreted as the “ism” of women’s power and rights. In history, the Chinese Communist Party has defined *nuquan zhuyi* as bourgeois, because of the potential conflicts between gender struggles and class struggles. In contemporary China, this term is primarily used to refer to Western feminism and often conveys a negative image of a men-hating woman hungry for power. For this reason, many Chinese feminists avoid calling themselves *nuquan zhuyi zhe*. See Ping-chun Hsiung, Maria Jaschok, et.al, eds. *Chinese Women Organizing* (2001) and Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment* (1999) for detailed historical reviews.

² **The New Cultural Movement** during the 1910s and 1920s was initially an intellectual movement that aimed to challenge traditional Chinese culture and promote a new culture, new social relations and new ways of thinking in Chinese society, especially about “science” and “democracy.”

sexes, it also calls for actions and questions the societal behaviors and the social system. In addition it believes that women must challenge and take on subversive practices in order to realize true gender equality. But translators who use *nuxing zhuyi* as the term for “feminism” believe that the term *nuquan zhuyi* clearly represents the first wave and has the characteristics of feminism in the nineteenth century. For example, this includes striving for women’s right to vote and reproductive rights, protesting and demonstrating. This view asserts that this concept of “feminism” represents how things were at this time. But, as feminism developed the second wave of feminism came about in the 1960s and multiplied. No longer was it merely a unitary movement – there was also communication and many different voices were heard. In this kind of situation, the term *nuquan zhuyi* could not comprehensively include all of the connotations of feminism. This is the first reason. The second reason for not using *nuquan zhuyi* is that they think this term would be easily misunderstood; it sounds “very strong.” It sounds as if it is against everything, even unreasonably oppositional. I remember rather prominent articles by people such as Gao Huizhu and Chen Yiyun.³ But as for me, I approve of the translation of feminism as *nuquan zhuyi*. Moreover, I feel that these two translations of “feminism” are quite different. I also think that the translation itself certainly reflects the cultural context. At the same time, a person’s choice of terms also reflects the degree of identification that she has with this concept. As for the term *nuxing zhuyi*, what does it try to avoid? Of course feminists urge people to avoid misunderstanding, but on the other hand, my view is that precisely because you advocate *nuxing zhuyi* you have written off the special value of *nuquan zhuyi*. This value or special characteristic is the core of feminism. What is this kind of core useful for? It impels questioning and challenging the unequal social structure and culture. Women advocate gender equality. This is not merely a kind of desire or belief. More importantly it is a kind of movement. Therefore I feel that *nuquan zhuyi* should be used when translating the term “feminism” because it represents the true meaning of feminism. *Nuxing zhuyi* feminists have persistently asserted that this usage can create misunderstandings, but things that create misunderstanding are exactly the special characteristics of *nuquan zhuyi* feminism. Therefore the things that you try to avoid are exactly the things that should not be avoided. Consequently I advocate the term *nuquan zhuyi* because in Chinese culture, terms like female (*nuxing*), male (*nanxing*), man (*nanren*) and woman (*nuren*) already create a fixed impression. When you say “female culture,” “femininity,” “female characteristics,” people think of being kind and courteous and virtuous, the so-called “feminine special characteristics.” Because I think this is something that should be avoided, we should not use a term which has these connotations. Therefore I feel that using *nuquan zhuyi* can more accurately reflect the essence and connotations of feminism. It can better publicly advocate feminism and the things associated with it. It should publicly confront things which *nuxing zhuyi* feminists want to evade. Therefore, I approve of the term *nuquan zhuyi*. Of course I realize that every person has his or her own views and understandings. I feel some people believe *nuxing zhuyi* is a better reflection of the term feminism. I think this is an individual attitude. *End*
00:33:17

³ **Gao Huizhu** is professor at the College of Law and Politics at Shanghai Normal University, P.R. China. **Chen Yiyun** is an expert on adolescent issues at the Institute of Sociology under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

India site-Shahjehan Aapa

01:21:20 Women's movement and feminist activism

Urvashi: Aapa, since the day you started this battle and the turning point at which you are now, it has been a long journey. When you look back now have you achieved something, learnt something? What do you feel? Was it a good experience?

Aapa: When we talk of experiences, I feel mine was a very worthy experience. I got a chance to learn a lot and also to bring people on the right path. We know that it was impossible for women to step out of the house but today it is possible and now we are walking as equals. At one time it was considered a big thing to stand with men and talk as their equals. It was difficult for a woman to ask, who are you, from where have you come, what are you doing? But today she walks along with him shoulder to shoulder. Today when I look back at my journey I feel that there will be a time when all the daughters, sisters and the girls, will learn much better things than us and will do much better things than us and move ahead. And today in a family if there is discrimination between a boy and girl, they will bring unity and they will learn a way to manage a family and will teach others too; the same way we have brought our lives to a new point. I won't say, it has been a very long journey; it has been about 25-26 years. I feel that whatever I have achieved is what I had lost in my childhood and in my youth — I got it all back in my old age and I have learnt a lot. I'm very happy within. But after my time whether my children or the daughters of this country will be happy is for them to decide. I feel that all the daughters in the country are my daughters. Even if I have to give my blood for them at this age, I won't hesitate and I will never stop toiling for them. (...) Feminism, women's perspective, women's movement are all very important issues for us. It is not the question of the woman alone, it is also the question of the man. We should take each step after taking into consideration the fact that we don't want to divide, we want to unite everyone. We want to walk together at the same time. It is not just a question of our moving ahead. Women's movement has been an important word and in order to gain from it I have myself used it many times. And many people have questioned it. I've always accepted it as the truth and use it with honesty, wisdom and deep gratitude. We're not raising just one issue, there are men with us; our daughters and sons are with us. If we consider schools, colleges and everything else and use the word judiciously, then unity will become the biggest strength we possess. Women's movement is my life, the most important issue of my life. (...) At the end of it all, one day people will come and put me away, but the best thing is, many discussions will arise. People will say this woman has raised so many different issues. If ten people praise ten others will criticise. I won't feel bad about it at all. I accept that and I am thankful that this women's movement began and that I was a part of it. And most of all I am very happy and I am with everyone in this happiness. *End of interview*

India site-Flavia Agnes

00:08:11:10 - Madhu: Wear stiletto shoes...stiletto.

Flavia: Stilettoes — lipstick, kibstick, lace dresses with strapless bra and what have you. Matching bags and matching shoes and the whole lot — so much so again my mother started getting scared. “My daughters don’t do this. This one’s destined to go astray. (...) My mother used to wear a sari. My mother never used to wear lipstick. She used to smoke. She used to drink. But she was not western looking in her... she was more western in her approach. (...) But not really deeply I think rather superficially. (...) I also don’t have good memories of my father at all. Right from childhood, till now, till he died. He died soon after I went. (...) After my father died, I became very protective towards my mother, for one thing. I wanted to love her. I wanted her to care for me. And since my other two sisters had their boy friends, I would be at home, more with her, helping in the cooking, helping with whatever. And I wanted to build a relationship. Also I told you that, one sister had taken me under her wing, and had taught me the ways of living in Aden. And I was working by then. Within two months, I got a job as a typist and so I was working. And then it was fun. And it was fun, that five sisters and mother will go out shopping together, we will buy stuff. We will cook if we want. If we don’t want, we will not cook. If we just want to eat fruits for the whole day, we will eat fruits. And all that started when my father was ill. When my mother had gone, we were just five sisters. And my elder sister was just two years older than me. She was 18, I was 16. So some people used to send us food. Otherwise, we used to go and buy watermelon and say, ‘Today we will have watermelon. Today we will have some fruit. Today we will go to somebody’s house to eat.’ So we had developed a pattern which is not traditional house-keeping. (...) Then my elder sister used to sew. She used to stitch all our clothes. My mother used to bake cakes and my sisters used to ice them. And we had lot of fun together as a family. Go for outings. Meet friends. My sister used to drive. So we felt much more liberated than many other families around. (...) So we became a sort of a very early kind of feminism. If you would like to term it that way. Very — no dependence on men. Trying to live your life. Even electrical connections to fix up. Whatever had to be done, in the house we used to do. Repairing the car, changing the tyre. So there was no segregation that this is men’s job, this is women’s job. (...) *End at 00:10:47:00*

India site—Neera Desai

0:58:17 C.S.Lakshmi: Neeraben, a linked question that I would like to ask is that when you speak very often and when you write, you use Women’s Studies perspective and feminist perspective alternately. For you, there’s no difference. But I think that this is not the case with Women’s Studies centres all over India. For you Women’s Studies has always stood for feminist perspective. This feminist perspective must have evolved over the years with exchanges from various scholars all over the world. Can you tell us about this, the journey of acquiring perspective?

Neera: Surely, because, as you rightly say, I use the term alternatively, depending upon the context, and the perspective, whatever we might call it – Women’s Studies’ perspective or feminist perspective – which I have derived has been over a period of time. And one of the books which had influenced me at that time was by Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein on women’s two

roles in society⁴. Because for the first time this question, of middle class women coming into the arena of work, and therefore the problem of conflict and adjustment and everything was being highlighted. And from that perspective slowly I was developing this whole idea, and whole notion, that women's status has been affected by the patriarchal society structure and how, and to this concept, to come, I have travelled a long journey. And not that these terms were unfamiliar to me, because in anthropology, we do study patriarchy, and patriliney and matriliney and all that but in this adequate perspective, it came to me over a period of time, and in this, many experiences which I had undergone, helped, and one of the important exposures which I had was during three years – that is '77, '78, and '79, to '80, when I attended various conferences abroad and came in contact with the feminists who were looking at the issue from the whole question of patriarchy and capitalism, both. And that is how I was exposed to liberal feminists, the radical feminists and the socialist feminists.

So this was the exposure which I got, and through these exposures and then, before that, there was one experience which I had in our country that in '75, which was in a way, the year of Emergency⁵ and in that year there was a conference in October, at Pune⁶, organised by Gail Omvedt⁷ and others, of women of more oppressed categories – and of course, others had also come, but for the first time to attend such a gathering where prostitutes would also be there, where students will be also there, where teachers would be there, where political activists would be there, it was also a very great experience for me.

India site—Neera Desai

1:02:44 C.S.Lakshmi: Neeraben, could you tell us about the action programme that the research centre has done so far?

Neera: Research Centre started in '74 and within 2 years, because we, as I said to you, we were always thinking of doing action. And the major action programme started in '77-'78 and that was in an area South of Bombay, 180 kilometres. away, which is called Udwarda. And we took first seven Villages in Udwarda, and there, first we had the survey of that region to find out what are

⁴ This book is called *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work*, and was published in 1956.

⁵ On [June 21, 1975](#), Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was found guilty of election fraud by the Indian High Court. She was ordered to leave her seat Parliament and banned from running for an additional six years. Rather than face the charges, Indira declared a [State of Emergency](#), and in her own words brought democracy "to a grinding halt". Invoking article 352 of the [Indian Constitution](#), she granted herself extraordinary powers and launched a massive crackdown on civil liberties and political opposition. Indira's emergency rule lasted nineteen months. Some have argued that India was badly in need of economic recovery after the strain of the 1971 Indo-Pak war on the exchequer. Also communal Hindu-Muslim riots, which had been surfacing again in the 1960s and 70s virtually ceased, and during the initial stages of the Emergency the government seemed to be working with vigour. However with the stringent measures imposed during Emergency, the Indian public (chiefly the poor) and opposition grew increasingly resentful. The state of Emergency continued until [January 18, 1977](#), when Indira Gandhi suddenly announced the next general election in March, and released her opponents from prison. The emergency was not revoked until [March 23, 1977](#).

⁶ A city in the Indian state of Maharashtra.

⁷ Born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Gail Omvedt has been a citizen of India since 1982. She is a scholar-activist, working with new social movements, in particular women's groups and farmer's organizations.

their needs, and what are their demands for change. And then, it was a beginning of the programme. And later on, the entire programme was built up on empowering and conscientising women, particularly the lower-caste women to their situation. But the more important question was of making them aware of the situation. So we had various programmes – training programmes, seminars and group discussions and training programmes to make women aware. Starting from seven to nine villages, today the coverage is to more than 50 villages. And craft centre and many things have come up there. But I would also like to emphasize that when we accepted the basic philosophy that action has to be the part of our consciousness raising and our understanding of women's status, action also means supporting other's action, and supporting and also participating in those activities which have been undertaken by other women's groups to change society. And this is how I personally, and the centre, came into close contact with the activist groups of those period, which might be still continuing. And it is as a part of this only, I have been attending most of the activist conferences which have been held in the country. I have been benefiting. That doesn't mean I agree with everything they are saying, or, I share their way of analysis of everything or share their method of solving the problem, but I do share with them the sensitiveness and the concern they are showing towards the women's issues. We started Women's Studies by saying that we are going to speak their language, we are going to speak poor women's language, or the language which they would understand, the idiom which they would understand, but today what we are speaking is something which even we don't understand. So what has happened to the praxis? And this is a very big dilemma which is going on in my mind, but that doesn't mean that I have lost faith in the action part.... My firm belief is that you cannot segregate theory from practise. Both of them go together, and somehow or the other, the centre or the scholar has to exhibit or manifest that there is concern for both. Because merely talking about action, I don't think has any value.

India Site-D. Sharifa

01:34:47:00 Feminism

Lakshmi: Sharifa, would you call yourself a feminist? In your opinion, what is feminism?

Sharifa: I have never said in so many words that I am a feminist. But my action is informed by feminist thinking, I feel. A girl must consider her self-respect, her mind, her thoughts, and decisions to live her own life, as her responsibility. Likewise, her life and all happenings are within the framework of this society. 'I have the right to all the privileges and recognition accorded in the society. I have to demand it.' That feeling should be there. Another thing is, when a woman realizes the status given to her by her family, her religion and her society, there is no stopping that woman. Only then, you can say that she is emerging with true feminist thinking.

So things like this — that women must receive genuine social recognition, there should be possibilities for this message to reach all women and be absorbed.

Every girl should be able to determine the way, she wants to live, saying, "My life. I must live it." Once this reaches home, I believe that the work and thoughts of feminists and their action will be genuine and fully evolved.

(...)End at 01:36:27:00

Poland Site-Anna Titkow

00:01:05 Chapter 1 Feminism, Education

SW: I'd like to ask how it all started out. How did your alliance with feminism begin? At what moment of your life did you start thinking about feminism, about gender, and about relations between genders? This is a request for you to talk about yourself...

AT: It's really funny since when I remembered yesterday that we had an appointment for today, for today's meeting, I took the anthology you've mentioned and looked at the date we put in when we signed each other's copies, since it was a book promotion. It was exactly 20 years ago; it was exactly on November 16, 1984, and I think it's very funny. I like things like this a lot, and they are, I think, meaningful in a way, since it'd never occur to me that I'll run into stuff like this in my life. The book promotion for *Sisterhood Is Global* is... there are a lot of authors there, but only 25 had been invited. I had the honor to be among those 25. And it was this kind of a meeting at a table, a round table, and we were all introducing ourselves and talking about ourselves. It wasn't a known custom, and we didn't have such experiences in Poland in any situations, really. And women would get up and say, "I am divorced," "I am a lesbian," and would talk about some stories from their lives that were important to them. And I was terribly embarrassed; it was very difficult for me to say something about myself. This was the time when I was getting divorced, so I said I was just getting a divorce, but in general I didn't think I was a feminist, because while I was listening to their stories, I mean about things they did in their lives, what it was all like, I decided I didn't fit the kind of definition of feminism which was in the air. To which Robin Morgan, I think, responded, "Oh no! Because you've written this piece, and you're here with us, you're a feminist." This way I got to be defined as a feminist, kind of externally by... and it was by a high authority in feminism. I think it is... when they're using this technique, which I like more and more, as a general instrument, not only for political struggle, I'd say, but also for gathering materials, which may become a source of scientific inquiry... I mean what used to be called "herstory," what is called "herstory." I like it more and more as a way of getting to know the world, including even various social processes. I think that perhaps in the majority of cases, except maybe... I mean in Poland except for very young people, and maybe it's happening differently abroad, but I think that in a place like Poland, in case of women my age, you know, or in other words sixty... women in their sixties, it's much more complicated. I mean, well, that the appearance of this word happened much later than when they were actually building... well, it'll sound really jargon-like, but I mean building their feminist identity as such. I think it was made up of very many various elements. Because, on one hand, I remember that I really, really wanted to be different than my mother, and here is a paradox, it wasn't because she didn't want me to get an education, just the opposite, or because she wasn't an independent, self-supporting woman, no, it wasn't that. It's only that I believed she didn't have enough feminine traits, so it's possible to say that at this point I missed something... even though, admittedly, some feminist trends directly speak about the essence, the gist... and it's simply a basis for defining separateness of women. At any rate... it was... but it was important because at this point I became rebellious... I was maybe 12 or 13 years old, and I decided I would be different. Of course, I didn't know what I would be like, I had no clue, but I knew I would be different.

Now, after many years have passed, I think that, paradoxically, I didn't miss the traits that are important in promoting and carrying out careers, or some professional programs, but the ones that are simply feminine. But at any rate, what mattered was that I rebelled that I would be different, also that I'd be a little different from my friends. Since I was born in a small town, I was a bit of a foreign child, different because I came from a house where there were books, and I had music lessons, for which I'm grateful to my parents, since it's still a kind of passion of mine today. There were also newspapers and journals, so, in all, it was a little bit, I think, it was a little bit hard for me to communicate with other kids, which was painful at this age. So it was also that I kind of didn't want to be like them, because they kept talking about boys, and I wasn't really into it, because I was overweight and full of complexes, and just in general it wasn't my thing. So I think there was this sense... that perhaps I have to count only on myself, and this is another important element, I'd say a second element, which... of course, I can't place it in time when it happened, but for sure there was this moment I realized I had to do something. It wasn't very clear what exactly I had to do. Anyhow, going away to college certainly helped, and what's happening in the western world when children, you know, get separated from their parents more or less after high school and stand on their own two feet really helps in building the ability to think about the world, in general, and about oneself. But we're still very far from any kind of thinking in feminist categories, no matter how we'll define feminism here. I mean I'm talking about myself. And the situation in college was conducive for developing this kind of independence, which, let's say, is a certain... it seems to me a very important foundation, a starting point, a basis for building some kind of unconventional orientations, let's say. And I was lucky enough to still have such eminent teachers as the Ossowskis,⁸ Ajdukiewicz,⁹ Tatarkiewicz,¹⁰ Kotarbiński.¹¹ So it really was the world... of the people who, when they saw a freshman student... When you were a Professor Tatarkiewicz, you'd come up, extend your hand, and ask, "How are you Ms..." So it was, it was this... these weren't the males, who showed up later, who showed up in various places where I worked. I mean I'm talking about my male colleagues who behaved exactly like males, males with a sign, "Well, you are different." At this department, I had a feeling it didn't really matter whether I was a girl or a boy. It was perhaps very important, it was... *End at 00:09:13*

*US Site-Martha Ojeda*¹²

⁸ **Ossowska, Maria** (1896-1974): philosopher and sociologist, director of Theory and History of Morality Department at the University of Warsaw and Director of Theory and History of Morality Department at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Author of *Bourgeois Morality, Social Determinants in Moral Ideas, Moral Norms: A Tentative Systematization*, among others. **Stanislaw Ossowski** (1897-1963): sociologist and cultural studies theorist and one of the best known intellectuals in post-World War II Poland.

⁹ **Ajdukiewicz, Kazimierz** (1890-1963): professor of philosophy and author of many theories and concepts in the fields of philosophy and logic.

¹⁰ **Tatarkiewicz, Wladyslaw** (1886-1980): philosopher, historian of ideas, historian of art and aesthetician, who was a well-known figure in Polish humanities. As a historian of aesthetics, in *History of Aesthetics*, he introduced *implicite* and *explicite* aesthetics, which became internationally recognized.

¹¹ **Kotarbinski, Tadeusz** (1886-1981): professor of philosophy and author of numerous theories. He influenced Polish philosophical culture and became its guardian spirit of sorts.

¹² **Martha Ojeda** has been the Executive Director of the Tri-National Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras since 1996. Originally from Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, she worked for 20 years in the Free Trade Zone factories or maquiladoras. While a factory worker, she

Jayati: Thank you. I'm going to shift focus a bit now and ask you to reflect a little bit about feminism and its importance in your work or relevance to your work, if at all. I just want to start off asking, how do you understand the term feminism, and what do you...what does it mean to you, and in your work?

Martha: Well I think is that...is not easy question. Is not easy question because now that I been so lucky having all these opportunity to be traveling and learning, I was finding how some womens understand feminism. When I been learning that some of them has tried to fight for women's rights, or is tried to improve the social condition between women and right, all those things I been a little bit concerned because with us it's all the...the way that we were living in the border is different. It's about...for us it's like, how is the labor force and what is the role of the women? How the capital, with all these flows, coming here, is being...really labeling the women, gender issues in the labor force, and how is this division is a system who really...put this stereotypes and transfer to the laborers?

Jayati: Um-hum.

Martha: And that's the way that we are trying to teach the workers in a way - in this gender and the global economy workshops - in order that they understand that these stereotypes or whatever is not one war between men and women. It's frame it in the system, frame it in the capital, and how it's transfer, the divisions of labor. So, if it is in that way, yes, I because I'm working with the womens. But if it's in the way that try to just lead the womens like the only ones who are suffering this...they are suffering more, but I think it's not in that way. It's not an issue that womens against mens, or whatever. It's...frame it in labor and capital and how we are producing all these goods that we are not able to...to really afford it, and why we are paying or more exploiting them. And then, so it should be in that frame²⁵⁵.

Jayati: So would you call yourself a feminist?

Martha: If it's framed like this, yes.

Jayati: Okay.

Martha: If it's in the other way, no.

*US Site: Sista II Sista*¹³

studied law in Monterrey, Mexico. As director of CJM, Ojeda coordinates the Maquiladora Worker Empowerment Project, a popular education program that conducts workshops for maquiladora workers on labor law, the constitutional wage, health and safety, reproductive rights, and fund-raising with an emphasis on training the workers.

¹³ **Sista II Sista** a collective of working class young and adult Black and Latino women who work with young women of color in Brooklyn, NY to develop personal, spiritual and collective power. Some examples of their work include: The Freedom School for Young Women of Color, and The Big Mouth Project which is a series of

Nadine: ...The name of your organization is Sista II Sista. You work with women and young...young women, adult women. But I haven't heard you use the term "feminist." So I'm going to provoke you here and ask you to...what do you think of the term? Do you use it? Do you have a position on it?

Verónica : Well, I personally don't use the word feminist or the word activist, um, to describe my work or myself. Um, and I think it's a...it's partly the reality that in the United States what those two words conjure up for me are middle to upper class white people and, when it comes to feminists, women. Um, ah, you know, throwing off the shackles of...of patriarchy here in the United States and rising up and saying, "I want to vote." And...and so that doesn't...that's not me. And I don't relate to that history and, and so I don't use either of those terms.

Nadine: What about for you Loira?

Loira: Yeah, I'm not no feminist, you know.

Verónica : [laughs]

Loira: I mean, I don't even...you know, like we're talking last night and...and Veró was like "I'd rather use the word organizer than the word activist," and all these things. For me, like all this work, I don't really name it nothing. You know, it's just like, it's just what I have to do, you know?

Nadine: Um-hum.

Loira: It's just my responsibility, you know. Like I want things to be better and different for people in my community. That's it, point blank, you know. And...and it's not just for women, you know. It's...it's for my community, you know. I'm specifically choosing to work with women because I'm a woman and I think we all have different experiences within our community, you know. But it's not under like any like word, you know, or...or I don't know, whatever, like those categories are...

232

Verónica : Um-hum.

Loira: ...you know, it's just what I have to do, you know. I just see it as like my responsibility, you know, like...you see it and you don't like you, you can't just sit around and complain about it. You've got to try to do something to change it, point blank, you know.

Nadine: So you don't see your work as, you know, feminist work.

Loira: I would never call my work feminist work. It's just like I...I don't...I don't relate at all to that word.

Nadine: Okay.

Loira: Like feminist. Like it's just...and not even like in the, you know, making a point to not use it. It's just not even in my head...

workshops and talks on violence against women, ageism, sexism, sexual harassment, peer pressure and understanding multiple expressions of oppression and privilege.

Nadine: Yeah.

Verónica : Yeah, yeah.

Loira: ...it's not part of my vocabulary even, you know. Like...and it's...yeah, it's like, we...It's definitely not in the vocabulary of any of the young women that we work with. It's not...

Verónica : It's not part of our reality.

Loira: Right, it's just like...

Verónica : And I think also like at least from what I've seen in the group, in the Collective, it's been sort of like that is more like on a theoretical...like what you might see in universities, trying to...trying to describe to other people in big fancy words what we do. And it's more like why should we even address or respond or, you know, like play within that...that little configuration. It's not necessary. And that's...I know at least for me in terms of activist, that's definitely what it conjures up, like some...somebody who has extra time on their hands, so that's why...you know, and they feel guilty or whatever, and that's what they do. And it's not...doesn't come from like a necessity. Like, no, we need to do this and...and it's just second nature like...

Nadine: Um-hum.

Verónica : ...breathing, you know.

Reproductive Choice

India site-Lata PM

00:47:08 Activism (13) against Injectable Contraceptives

Aruna: Lata you were telling us about various types of protest; I remember you had written a song on injectible contraceptives and it had become very famous. Will you sing it for us? (...)

Lata: A needle has come into the hospital, Sister, Sometimes they call it Net En and sometimes Depo Provera/ Big countries have laid this trap./ Yes, laid a trap. Laid a trap and made us prisoners. They consider the Third World toys of clay./ A needle has come into the hospital, Sister.

Lata: It's about the Third World women being used as guinea pigs. The women's movement has constantly spoken about it. From the beginning it has talked about it.

Aruna: From the beginning it has talked about it.

| Lata: Yes, be it sex determination test or Net En or Depo Provera, I remember Maria Mies¹⁴ came here and began talking about all this but we had already spoken about all this, and the campaign included these issues. (...) *End at 00:48:26*

¹⁴ A Marxist-feminist sociologist who worked for many years in India. She is known for her theory of capitalist-patriarchy.

Poland Site-Barbara Labuda

00:25:14 CHAPTER 7 ABORTION

SW. And was abortion law also a topic of your meetings?

BL. Of course, and the abortion law... Just as I came to France, it happened to be at the moment when there was this initiative... I don't remember what it was called; there was this antiabortion [sic.] initiative, this written appeal by very famous women, intellectuals and artists, who came out in favor of a liberal antiabortion law [sic.], abortion law I mean, because in Polish, well, you know what I mean... because abortion was punishable by law in France then. So they said, "Let's admit to having one"; whether it was true, or not, I don't know, and I don't think anybody cared, except for the tabloids. They'd say, "I admit I had an abortion," which meant, "You're welcome to lock me up." And it was clear that this bourgeois state, or as we'd say repressive, police state, would not lock up a famous actress, or some great, eminent, famous lawyer, since Gisele Alienie [sic] was there, among others, a very well-known, very eminent lawyer, who's been taking on the hardest cases to this day, who has successfully defended and still defends a lot of women who have been charged in court for purely... you know discrimination or for reasons of morality. So it was clear that they wouldn't be locked up. And this thing, this appeal happened, in turn... the catalyst for it was the fact that some modest woman, a worker I think, was to be locked up for having an abortion. And this appeal, this solidarity by these women from circles other than the quote unquote, working class, caused the laws to be changed. France got... I don't remember whether it was right after that, but it was relatively soon after these initiatives, after this appeal, which dominoed into more and more and more initiatives, including various actions at universities, and in the streets till it reached the Parliament and was changed, but it must have been soon, because since as early as nineteen-seventy-some, France has had a liberal abortion law.

SW. It must have been surprising to you that in that country, with all of its freedoms, there was a restrictive law, restrictive law relating to motherhood...

BL. Well, yes...

SW. ...it wasn't the case in Poland then...

BL. Well, yes, but remember that this freedom has different faces. This is what I was learning there, that you come to a country, where you have your passport at home, that is to France, where you can move freely around France, or around other countries of Western Europe, but at the same time there is a law so different than ours. We had a law that was liberal then, and theirs was restrictive. I was learning about social norms of the West then, that this freedom can assume different faces. For them it was surprising, too, that, you know... in a police state like ours you could have an abortion anytime. Which was the case, in fact. *End 00:28:52*

Poland Site-Malgorzata Tarasiewicz

00:18:05 Women's Rights, Feminism, Abortion, Solidarity

SW. So how exactly did it start with women's rights?

MT. I mean... with the women's rights issues, it really all began still during the times of the Freedom and Peace Movement, because the western women's organizations were very much interested in learning what was going on here, whether... what this grass-roots movement was like, whether women participated, and so on, and so forth. And there was this conference, the so-called Zytnia Street conference, where the Freedom and Peace Movement activists met with... At the beginning of my activities in the Freedom and Peace Movement there was a well-known conference at Zytnia Street in Warsaw, where activists from the Freedom and Peace Movement met with representatives of various grass-roots, left-wing groups from western Europe, and feminists came to that, too. This was my first meeting with people who would later become very important to me. They were famous feminists and less known ones; they were women who were involved, who worked in this organization War Resisters' International,¹⁵ for example. There was a feminist writer Mena Kostarz from Canada; there was a nurse Vibeke from Holland, who taught us how to create support groups. This woman from the War Resisters' International, for example, would teach how to organize civil resistance, that is what the civil disobedience was all about, and in what way to resist, the non-violent way to resist. And I mean this was also a very interesting experience. At the same time, they were all feminists and it was very... I mean I liked what they were talking about very much, and they were kind of completely... I had an impression that they were defining things I knew about but I didn't realize they really existed. I mean... I realized various things such as, for example, discrimination, even within the Freedom and Peace Movement, with this domination of men in the Movement, for example. And I had known that but it didn't seem possible to go against. The only solution seemed to be like these men, of course, and then, at this point, it'd be possible to become visible, to become a leader as important as they were. Being a woman, on the other hand, with the value system and behavior patterns kind of typical for women, was something that didn't give an opportunity to become a leader. And these women made me aware that this was not the case, that women in the West and in the States felt the same and that they actively opposed that. And some of them decided this was a problem and this is how a really big movement started. Some of them but in various places, so that it wouldn't be thought of as just a few women in one central place that decided about that. And these women brought together a few women from the Freedom and Peace Movement, who also started... who also thought similarly and they believed it was possible to change things... I mean by listening to women from the West. Later on, they were also sending us a lot of publications, and coming many more times, so that there were really endless conversations and I got a lot from them.

SW. Do you remember what year that was?

MT. It was 1985, no, I'm sorry, 1986. And I remember that these talks were also attended by women, some of whom, at least one in Poland and one in Hungary, are very... play an important

¹⁵ *War Resisters' International*: founded in 1921 under the name "Paco". It is based on the notion that any and all wars are crimes against humanity. The organization promotes nonviolent action against the causes of war or the preparation of war.

role in the women's movement. In Poland, Urszula Nowakowska from The Center for Women's Rights, was one of the people who were at Zytunia Street, but there was also one of the leading Hungarian feminists, who was also at the beginning of her involvement, and she collaborated with us, Judit Oczari. So these were those first steps. And then I started to... this paper was published... our group, more anarchistic than other groups in the Freedom and Peace Movement, published it in Gdansk. It was called *A Cappella* and I wrote feminist pieces there maybe twice; one of them was about the "Miss Polonia" contest, and the other was a more general piece about feminism, about foundations for feminism, about assumptions behind feminism. And I have to admit that even our anarchist male friends, who, one would think, should receive these kinds of pieces favorably, reacted with nervousness, so it gave me some food for thought: what's the big deal? Why was it that speaking about freedom for women, about a possibility of women making choices, about the idea that women should not be treated as objects... why did it provoke such an unbelievable resistance even among anarchists? This was shocking to me, and it also kind of made me aware that this meant that something was at stake, that the problem did exist, that it wasn't, as it could seem, that it existed but only far away somewhere, but that it existed close by if even my male friends, with whom we were protesting in the street and collaborating, were suddenly against us when it came to the women's issues. And so the news about my involvement in feminism somehow got around, and that's how I got my work in Solidarity, this next stage, already after 1989, when I became a coordinator of the National Women's Section, that is a person responsible for building this section from scratch. It was because... even though there were very many women in Solidarity – after all, many women worked for the underground and played exceptionally important roles – later on it turned out that there were no women in the union's leadership and that there actually was no single unit within the union that would represent women's issues. And because international labor unions put such pressure on Solidarity that they'd need to do something for women, and because Solidarity had to take into account that they were getting donations from the western union headquarters, they thought they had to kind of cave in, so they decided to employ a person who'd organize such a section and would coordinate it. There was only this disappointment and a sore spot for the Solidarity's bosses that evolved from this and it resulted from the fact that this Women's Section acquired an authentic character, that women's interest in it was significant, and that these women started to formulate postulates that were very important to them. This kind of surpassed what the Solidarity's bosses expected concerning how these women would sound and how well organized they would become. That's why the Women's Section reached the end of its life in a rather sudden and dramatic way. That was because the women simply formulated two postulates, and these two postulates were kind of critically important, and since others had no major significance when it came to this problem, the problem of acceptance by the union's leadership... The postulate concerning abortion, on the other hand, and the one about women's participation in the union's governance were critically important, because exactly at that point, at the beginning of the nineties, there was an ongoing debate about what kind of abort... anti-abortion legislation, that is whether such legislation should be implemented and how it was to be formulated. And unfortunately, Solidarity, as an organization closely affiliated with the Catholic Church believed that the law should be introduced... a very restrictive anti-abortion law should be introduced, and this was a resolution passed by the Solidarity Congress in 1992, I think, or maybe it was in 1991, I don't remember. The only problem was that among the Congress delegates there were around 10% of women while in the union the numbers were more or less even, that is the ratio of men to women was more or less fifty-fifty. And women were very discouraged and upset by this

resolution, and this newly created Women's Section formulated a goal to change... to exert an influence on Solidarity's position on abortion. Of course, it was completely utopian to imagine that something like this was possible. Nonetheless, we were faithful to our values and adamant in our support for this postulate. The end result was that when the anti-abortion legislation reached the Senate, that is after the first readings in the Sejm,¹⁶ when it was passed to the Senate,¹⁷ the Senate representatives invited representatives of various women's organizations, including representatives from the Women's Section, for the so-called community consultations. But, of course, neither Senators nor the Solidarity leadership expected the views expressed by Ms. Anastazja Konieczna, a representative of the Women's Section, who, by the way, was considered an authority among activists from Solidarity, from the opposition... she was a worker from Wrocław, that she would speak against this restrictive legislation. And this, of course, was a beginning of an end, because the moment when... I mean, as long as Kaczyński¹⁸ was the head of Solidarity, and he is a pragmatic politician, so he didn't use repressive measures against the Women's Section. He... just, like Walesa,¹⁹ by the way. This was actually quite interesting to me that... I mean, or perhaps it was because they minimized the significance of the Women's Section; they didn't see it as threatening, so perhaps it wasn't worth it... This is when their pragmatism became visible, that they didn't think it was worth it to raise this issue, to go against this, because it would simply die of natural causes anyway. On the other hand, the moment when narrow-minded Krzaklewski²⁰ came to power, who was really... His power, I feel, didn't come from any charisma or from some broad support among union members, but from this specific political arrangement, where he was close to the Church and he had its support. For him, the

¹⁶ **Sejm:** The lower house of the bicameral National Assembly (the Senate is the upper house). The Sejm is the more powerful of the two chambers. The Sejm has the constitutional responsibility of initiating and enacting laws as well as overseeing state administration.

¹⁷ **Senate:** The upper house of the National Assembly (Sejm is the lower house). The Senate sets its own agenda and committee structure. As in the Sejm, committee appointments are dictated by the numerical strength of the parties and factions represented in the chamber. Besides its budget review function, the Senate also reviews Sejm legislation which it may approve, amend, or reject within thirty days.

¹⁸ **Kaczyński, Lech:** In the [1970s](#) he was an activist in the [anti-communist](#) movement. When Solidarity was legalized in the late [1980s](#), he was elected a Member of Parliament and vice-chairman of the Solidarity trade union (NSZZ Solidarność). He was a leader and founder of the [centrist](#) political party [Porozumienie Centrum](#) (*Center Agreement*) and the main adviser and supporter of Lech Wałęsa when he was elected the President of Poland in December [1990](#). Kaczyński was elected President of the Republic of Poland in October 2005.

¹⁹ **Wałęsa, Lech:** trade union activist, politician, President of the Republic of Poland from 1990 to 1995, Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 1983. During the first National Congress of Solidarity (September 5-October 7, 1981), he was elected Chairman of the National Commission of Solidarity. From 1980 to 1981, he worked in the Gdańsk Shipyard. Interned from December 13, 1981 to November 11, 1982, he returned to work in the Shipyard and continued underground union activities. In 1986, he created the Provisional Council of Solidarity, in 1987 became head of the National Executive Commission of Solidarity, and in 1988 began participating in negotiations with the communist authorities, which led to the Round Table talks. Recipient of the French Legion of Honor, he also received Honorary Doctor's Degrees from numerous universities, including Columbia University (1981), Catholic University in Leuven (1982), Harvard University (1983), and Gdańsk University (1990).

²⁰ **Krzaklewski, Marian** (1950-): a trade union activist, politician, and academic. In 1980, he was a co-founder of Solidarity in the Polish Academy of Sciences. After the implementation of martial law in Poland in 1989, he collaborated with underground Solidarity groups in the Upper Silesia. Arrested in 1984, fired from his job, and sentenced for political and union activism in 1985, he was freed as a result of the 1986 amnesty. During the Third National Congress of Solidarity (1991), he was elected a chairman of Solidarity's National Commission, and then again in 1992 and 1995. After initiating the foundation of Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS), he served as the chairman of its National Council from October 1996 to January 2001. Since September 1997, he served as a deputy for the third Sejm.

existence of the Women's Section with all these... from the perspective of the Church... that is with this one postulate against implementing the anti-abortion legislation was tragic, because it could in a way threaten his position in relation to the Church. So he kind of undertook steps toward repressing and dissolving the Women's Section. And these were... And also, I was, of course, quite naïve at that point, and I didn't have the kind of experience in political activity I have today, so it was kind of easy for him. He resorted to, well, totally absurd devices and he didn't want... I mean, every section had to have a charter registered by the National Commission, so, for example, he never... So the item that the Women's Section's charter was to be discussed and accepted by the National Commission was never placed on the agenda. I mean, there were always more important matters and this never found its way... was never discussed. But, when at one point, at the last moment, we managed to get the charter on the agenda and it was about to be discussed, Krzaklewski brought up some totally absurd points that the name couldn't be The National Women's Section but only the National Section of Women and other such stuff, and he just took it off the agenda, so that it couldn't be voted on. As a result, later on, he claimed that the Women's Section was illegal even though I was legally and formally employed as a Women's Section's coordinator. And he would simply invite me to his office and drag me into hours of conversations when he used some absurd argumentation. I mean, he was talking about... I mean, he was trying to convert me to his position, and I, in my naïveté, was trying to convert him to mine, which was a complete nonsense. And, psychologically, he got me to the point that I just figured it wasn't worth it. The Section's activists were harassed in this way, for example, that they weren't sent to any training abroad. One woman from Białystok didn't go because, as she was told, she was for abortion, so she couldn't represent the union abroad. Well... the Section members were forbidden to use phones in the regional union offices, so that they couldn't keep in touch with each other, and so on, and so forth. And finally, it got to the point when I was being blackmailed, so that I completely withdrew from this... I mean, not as a result of the blackmail, but because I decided it made no sense and that it'd be better to make people aware... to show outside what it was all really like, and to repudiate this Women's Section, which Solidarity had created later, you know this kind of a façade Women's Section, than to keep working there all the time and try to change things from within. So the report was prepared for the Helsinki Human Rights Foundation,²¹ I mean, no, I'm sorry, it was The Human Rights Watch, that's what it's called, and it's an equivalent of the Helsinki Foundation but in the US. The report was about the Women's Section, about how the Women's Section was repressed, and generally about what the situation of women's rights in the union was like. And this story kind of became... it got to be quite well known in its time. Nonetheless, the union didn't, of course, back out of their position, and the Women's Section ceased to exist in its previous shape, but the façade Section was created, consisting only of women from the right. *End at 00:35:44*

*US Site-Adrienne Asch*²²

²¹ **Helsinki Human Rights Foundation:** an independent non-governmental organization created in 1982 as a result of civil action. It monitors whether human rights and basic freedoms are being respected, as guaranteed by international treaties signed by Poland. The Helsinki Committee has been involved in a broad education campaign to popularize the idea of freedom and respect for the law. It also prepares reports on human rights violations in Poland, publishes a bulletin *Human Rights*, and since 1988 has been a member of the International Helsinki Federation of Human Rights, located in Vienna.

²² **Adrienne Asch** is a Professor of Bioethics and Epidemiology and Population

Anna: ...a lot of feminists are loathe to abandon the position that abortion should be available without regard to the reasons why a women might be wanting to choose an abortion, and...and they don't want to start it all down the slippery slope of questioning why, weighing a woman's reason for having an abortion. But you also argue eloquently that it's really hard to say that it's okay to abort fetuses with Down Syndrome, for example, but also that people among us who have Down Syndrome⁸¹ are full and equal citizens, that those...those two things don't sit very well together. So what are you thoughts on that, this difficult question of prenatal testing and abortion?

Adrienne: I guess I'll say...I'll try to say three things, since I've spent a lot of ink on this topic.

Anna: Right, right.

Adrienne: Condense it. But I think that as long as women...as long as women bear children, as long as women are pregnant people, women should decide whether they want their bodies to sustain life. And if they don't, they should have abortions available to them for whatever reason they want. But for the same reason that I think women and feminism critique the notion that women in Western countries or other countries choose to abort female fetuses, as...for the same reason that feminism is skeptical of that act, it may tolerate it, but it is skeptical of it...I think feminism should be skeptical of the act of aborting fetuses because of particular characteristics, whether they're sex or Down Syndrome, rather than...It's very different to say, "I did want to be pregnant, and I did want to raise a child, but now I have found out that this fetus I'm carrying is a girl and I really only want a boy." Or "Now I'm carrying a fetus that has cystic fibrosis⁸² or Down Syndrome and I don't want that." Well, the question I want women to ask themselves is, why don't they want that? How much do they know about life with cystic fibrosis or Down Syndrome? If...if they say that it's legitimate to be a person with cystic fibrosis or Down Syndrome, why isn't it legitimate to be the parent of such a person? If they...if they say, well, of course they believe in women's equality, why should women abort female fetuses, or male ones for that matter. When you abort a fetus because of a characteristic, you're...you're making an assumption that that characteristic in some way is very dominant and controlling of what your life is...what the life of that child, if it comes into being, is going to be. And I don't think that's true. Even sex, being male or female, only tells you one thing about a person. It tells you something about how they may be treated and it tells you something about their reproductive capacities, but it doesn't tell you what they're going to be interested in. It doesn't tell you what their personality is going to be like. The same thing is true for somebody with Down Syndrome or cystic fibrosis or deafness or muscular dystrophy. It tells you some things about limitations and

Health at Yeshiva University in New York. Much of her scholarship examines issues of bio-ethics, reproduction, and disability. Asch has been a member of the board of directors of the American Society for Bioethics in Humanities and served on the Clinton Task Force on Healthcare Reform and the Ethical, Legal, and Social Implications Policy Planning Group of the National Human Genome Research Institute. She has also served on the board of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective.

impairments, but it doesn't tell you who that person with muscular dystrophy will be. Are they going to be energetic, or are they going to be quiet, or are they going to be interested in things their parents are interested in? Or are they going to be interested in totally different things? Those are the kinds of questions I would like people to ask themselves before women automatically rush to the abortion clinic when they get a prenatal diagnosis of spina bifida⁸⁴ or Down Syndrome or cystic fibrosis or a sex they think they don't want. I think abortion has to be available to women as long as women are the pregnant people who bear children. If they don't want to be going through gestation, they shouldn't have to. But I think they should think about, well, if they did want to be pregnant, why don't they want to be pregnant with a fetus that has this particular characteristic? Isn't that a kind of discrimination and stereotyping that they don't like in their own lives?

*US Site: Loretta Ross*²³

Zakiya: Sort of what is the framework SisterSong uses?

Loretta: Well, the basis of our framework is the human rights framework.

Zakiya: Um-hum.

Loretta: What happened is that we had a chance as individual women of color to participate in the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, as well as the Beijing Fourth World Conference for Women in '95, and it turned out that our international counterparts are much more familiar with the human rights framework...

Zakiya: Um-hum.

Loretta: ...and they use it in their activism, where in the United States, we tend to limit ourselves to the Constitutional framework of *Roe v. Wade*. And so as women of color, we went to Beijing and Cairo and came home wanting to use that human rights framework here at home. And we first coined the term, "reproductive justice" as a way to marry reproductive rights to social justice. We did that in '94, and this was even before SisterSong. But once SisterSong got organized, we decided to intentionally popularize the reproductive justice framework, as a way to express the human rights framework in a U.S. context. Um, and then we started articulating a concept that we call reproductive oppression, which is those human rights violations that not only keep a woman from deciding what happens to her body, but causes...calls attention to the fact that every time a woman is pregnant—actually every time a woman even thinks she's pregnant because misses a cycle she doesn't even actually have to be pregnant to start counting the calendar. But anyway, she is trying to figure out what she's going to do with this pregnancy in the context of what's happening in her community. So if she's in a community that lacks access to healthcare, if she's in a community that's suffering from immigration raids, or if she's in a community where there's a lot of violence and

²³ **Loretta Ross** is an activist on women's issues including reproductive justice, human rights, and opposition to hate groups and right wing organizations. She successfully organized women of color delegations for the massive pro-choice marches NOW sponsored in 1986 and 1989, and in 2004, she was national codirector of the March for Women's Lives in Washington, DC, the largest protest march in U.S. history with more than one million participants.

there's a lot of surveillance by the state or by the police, she has to take all of that into account before she can talk about what's going to happen to her body or whether she's going to keep or not keep the child. Does she know if she tells her partner that she's pregnant, is she going to get beaten? If she tells her employer that she's pregnant, is she going to get fired? I mean, all of these are the calculations that women—all women, make by the way. It's not just women of color. All women make these calculations. And so part of our criticism is that the pro-choice movement has removed all of those other complicating factors from the discussion, as if it's only, "Can I have an abortion?" "Can I afford it?" and "Is it legal?" I mean, they just reduce that whole really complicated woman's life to that.

Zakiya: Um-hum. That's right.

Loretta: And that is an objectification very similar to what the right wing does. Only they objectify the fetus and the women and we're objectifying the woman and the fetus. So I mean...many of us offer a critique about the anti-abortion and the Pro-Choice Movement for objectifying women. So anyway, we draw attention to reproductive oppression, because reproductive oppression is economic violence. It's, you know, It's, you know, immigration raids, it's violence against women, it's removal of children from foster...into foster care. It's all of those things.

Zakiya: Yeah.

Loretta: The lack of affordable housing. The lack of child care. All of these things form that...that quilt called reproductive oppression. And the only way to address reproductive oppression is through organizing people to protect their human rights. And the full panoply of human rights, not just gender rights or sexual rights, but the full...the right to have a job paying a living wage or the right to receive services in a language other than English. I mean, all of these are human rights.

Transnational Feminisms

India Site- Jarjum Ete

01:18:43 Feminism (9); Activism (13); Sexuality (18)

C. S. Lakshmi: Jarjum you very consciously associated yourself with the larger organisations like the Indian Association for Women's Studies. How has it helped you in your evolution as an activist, as a feminist?

Jarjum Ete: I believe every association, or for that matter any interaction with someone who is from a different background, has always kind of enriched understanding and given a perspective to your maybe experiences or even thoughts-- and my association with the Indian Association of Women's Studies and my stint as Joint Secretary in IAWS for one year with, you know, the doyens of the Indian Women's movement and Feminist movements. It has, of course, given me those insights into especially the discourse on feminism, at least a kind of philosophical, theoretical understanding of what all this feminism is about, because for me a...a I actually, as I

mentioned earlier also, I got into activism per chance, and my association in the Arunachal Pradesh Women's Welfare Society was an accident. Of course the instinct to come to the defence of girls or women who need support, the empathy has always been there, but maybe we are doing things without much awareness about what's happening elsewhere, you know, and so my time spent with the feminists of India has added to my understanding, and perhaps that's why I am sitting with you here today being recorded. (laughs)

C. S. Lakshmi: You've also gone outside India. Did you attend the Beijing Conference? What was your experience?

Jarjum Ete: I was in the NGO forum²⁴ during the Beijing Conference at Huairo and in fact our organisation was accredited to the UN, that year, for the Beijing Conference and the best part was that something like *aaj tak maine samjha tha ki main akeli pagal hoon to bahut saare pagalo ke beech mein aur maaza aaya!* (Until then I'd thought I was the only mad one but I enjoyed being with other mad people!) (both laughs) So like, you know, in small places like Arunachal you feel at times you are the only one who is so concerned but when you realise there are other friends, other like-minded people all over the world, it gives you that kind of energy, the strength to go on, to move on. And also to survive the kind of pressures at times, especially as human rights defenders or even as women's activists. Now of course it has gained a bit of acceptance, but those days it was quite different. And Beijing especially gave me the exposure to, you know, the best part that I learned from my Beijing experience, about the sexuality of women. Because this is something I had personally not had time to give a thought about. But sharing platforms with the lesbians, the prostitutes, you know, those kind of insights which I never had. So I went to the tents and, you know, tried to understand, and it added to my life and its quality perhaps.

C. S. Lakshmi: Meeting these women actually....

Jarjum Ete: Ya, meeting them and listening to them, how they feel, because, you know, you grow up with your own little mores and values, and, you know, there is so much of conventionalism in whatever set up you grow up in. So I had my own limitations, you know, because I have lived in this society for so long and prostitution is something which was totally alien. And lesbianism is something may be, you know, knowing or hearing about, like a very distant story somewhere else. But that also was a reality which never was discussed earlier. But today when we hear about the larger debates on sexuality and all that at least I feel comfortable, unlike my friends perhaps who didn't get those exposures and I have come to accept things as they are. There are differences, there are different people with different values.

C. S. Lakshmi: You have also been to Pakistan. Did you go as a part of a delegation? What was your experience?

Jarjum Ete: Yes, it was as part of a delegation. We have this group called the National Alliance of Women, which actually came together as a post Beijing follow up group from all over India. Smaller organisations which formed alliance, and one of our agenda of course is--apart from

²⁴ Meeting of representatives from over 2100 non-governmental organizations from around the world parallel to the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing in 1995.

following up the platform for action document of the, you know, UN commitments made by government of India--we have also been doing campaigns on violence and poverty. So we have this, you know, international movement going on against poverty and violence.

C. S. Lakshmi: Ya.

Jarjum Ete: It's called the World March of Women, and we had the charter going around the world. So when the charter reached India, we had to deliver it, you know, in Pakistan, to hand over to the partners in Pakistan. So that was as part of, you know, our delegation that I went. And a group was supposed to have, you know, gone across to Lahore—sorry, from Wagha into Lahore and then to Karachi, but there was some problem so I came back from Lahore. I didn't go to Karachi. But the best part was the common people, actually one peace across the border, and then we also realised, you know, small people don't have big...big says in big issues. That was some kind of helplessness people felt but otherwise a...at least since this was my first trip across to Pakistan, I realised and of course everyone said so, there is not much cultural differences also between North India and that part of Pakistan. And in fact we had good seminars and also some cultural programmes, exchanges of songs. And it was a very good experience because otherwise, you know, the media tells us like, you know, only about the wars and the....

C. S. Lakshmi: Ya

Jarjum Ete: Pickets and bomb blasts and, you know, how people are taken for underground training; militants and all those. But there is possibility of love and peace and, you know, friendship across the borders. (...)

01:27:11 Politics (8); Feminism (9)

C. S. Lakshmi: In your set of photographs I saw a photograph of yours with Clinton. How did that happen?

Jarjum Ete: Okay (laughs) I also don't know how it happened. But I got this call from the American embassy in Delhi. They said Mr. Clinton is coming to India, and we are inviting some young generation people to have an interaction with him in Bombay. And we want you to come and meet him. Then I had some problems. Because as part of the Indian People's movement and especially the women's movement, we had lots of problems about, you know, with the American policies especially vis-à-vis globalisation, and all those. I said I am not sure like, you know, if would like to come down and meet him. I said I will get back to you. They won't rest till I said yes! you know. Then I shared with my friends from all over. I sought advices, counsels from friends and well-wishers. And there were two lines of thought: people said no, protest, don't go; and some other very wise people like, you know, the more sagacious among the lot they said, Jarjum, but this is also an opportunity to put forward our thoughts through you. So let's take the opportunity and in fact many in Arunachal said, my god, world's most powerful man and they are inviting you to see him, talk to him, and you are not accepting the invitation! that's not possible! Finally, I was also convinced to make the best use of it and I accepted. That was his last trip to India as a US president. And I got to meet him, listen to him and share a few thoughts. I even put forward a written memorandum as secretary of the National Alliance on Women. And

we were only seven of us. Of course, others are very high profile young people, but I also really don't know where I got in from. (with laugh). But I was there. And it came out to be a very charismatic--of course Clinton's charisma is world reknowned. Then the best part I liked about him was his ability to draw out, you know, people. You know he made us all feel so comfortable like, you know, it was not as if we are talking to the most powerful man on earth, something like that. And his keenness seemed very genuine, very sincere kind of expressions, body language and even the words. And that was very appreciative, unlike most of our Indian leaders that was a big contrast, like, you know. I have seen some of India's top people you know, listened to them in meetings and all and seen them personally from about six-seven feet distance but except Madhavrao Scindia,²⁵ not many have been impressive. *End at 01:30:26*

²⁵ a prominent [Indian](#) politician and minister from the [Scindia](#) family, who formerly ruled [Gwalior](#), and was a 9-term member of the Lok Sabha (parliament) at the time of his death in 2001.