

Feminist Freedom Warriors

Genealogies, Justice, Politics, and Hope

Edited by **Chandra Talpade Mohanty** and **Linda E. Carty**



Praise for *Feminist Freedom Warriors*

“There are some books that will make a genuine difference because they are drawn from the experiences of those who have made a genuine difference. This is one of those books. By offering reflections from, and conversations between, feminist freedom warriors, this book is a reminder of just how much we need revolutionary, decolonial, anticapitalist, and antiracist feminism; how in fighting against structures, we are fighting for our lives. Each of these accounts of becoming and being feminists committed to radical transformation teaches us just how much we can do from what has been done; how we can make use of our imaginations, words, memories, knowledge, feelings, connections, and alliances in the project of building a more just world. This is a deeply inspiring and inspired collection.”

—Sara Ahmed, author of *Living a Feminist Life*

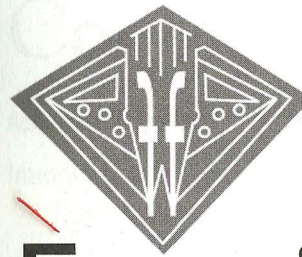
“In *Feminist Freedom Warriors* liberation is historicized, imagined, and enacted as contested struggle and dialogue. The intellectual-activist thinkers within explain that feminist praxis—poetics, pedagogies, and activism—is an ongoing refusal of global capitalism and colonialism. Comprising stories and interviews, *Feminist Freedom Warriors* shows that engendering political change, across racial and sexual identifications, is tied to the uneasy work of imagining solidarities outside our present (neoliberal) system of knowledge. What stands out, beautifully and urgently, is the praxis of sharing how to refuse infrastructures of violence. *Feminist Freedom Warriors* captures how sharing and talking and learning, and the struggle to collaborate, are tied to the grounded work of building new futures.”

—Katherine McKittrick, associate professor,
Department of Gender Studies, Queen's University

“This collection brings together feminist visionaries to think deeply about how we sustain our movements, each other, and ourselves in and through ongoing feminist struggle. Mohanty's and Carty's dialogues with the contributors reveal crucial insights into building and theorizing multi-issue movements that rely on intersectional,

antiracist, transnational feminisms. The collaborative endeavor illuminates the persistent intellectual capaciousness and radical hope of these scholar-activists. The contributors' complex engagements with feminist theory and praxis across geopolitical frameworks reaffirm coalitional possibilities so necessary in these turbulent times."

—T. Jackie Cuevas, author of *Post-Borderlandia*



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and Linda E. Carty

with generous assistance from Taveeshi Singh



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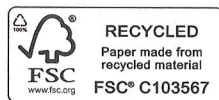
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Introduction

An Archive of Feminist Activism

*Conversations with Margo Okazawa-Rey,
Angela Y. Davis, Himani Bannerji,
Minnie Bruce Pratt, Amina Mama, Aída
Hernández-Castillo, and Zillah Eisenstein*

Linda E. Carty and Chandra Talpade Mohanty

The value of feminism or the value of antiracist, anticapitalist, anti-imperialist feminisms that are Marxist-inflected feminisms is that it allows us to think about the framework of our analysis or of our organizing at the same time as we use that framework to think about whatever it is we are examining. That is a habit that

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most people have not been able to embrace, because it is a habit that contravenes disciplinary thinking—in disciplinary thinking the framework is what enables everything else, so once you begin challenging the framework, everything falls apart. And feminism allows us to trouble the framework, allow things to fall apart, and at the same time put them back together. It allows us to imagine something entirely different.

—Angela Y. Davis

Feminism is at stake in how we generate knowledge; in how we write, who we cite. I think of feminism as a building project: if our texts are worlds, they need to be made out of feminist materials. Feminist theory is world-making. This is why we need to resist positioning feminist theory as simply or only a tool, in the sense of something that can be used in theory, only then to be put down or put away. It should not be possible to do feminist theory without being a feminist, which requires an active ongoing commitment to live one's life in a feminist way.

—Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*

This book is a labor of love and sisterhood. It grows out of and is anchored in an ongoing digital archive project called Feminist Freedom Warriors (FFW), begun in 2015 (feministfreedomwarriors.org). The digital archive project was born out of our engagement with anticapitalist, antiracist feminist struggles as women of color from the Global South. FFW is a project about cross-generational histories of feminist activism addressing economic, antiracist, social justice, and anticapitalist issues across national borders. These are stories of sister-comrades, many of whom we have worked and struggled with over the years, whose ideas, words, actions, and visions of economic and social justice continue to inspire us to stay the course. The book is a companion to the larger digital project, highlighting the stories and analytical frameworks of seven prominent feminist scholar activists: Margo Okazawa-Rey, Angela Y. Davis, Himani Bannerji, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Amina Mama, Aída Hernández-Castillo, and Zillah Eisenstein.

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Our conversations with these sister-comrades tell stories of politicization, of coming to consciousness and developing revolutionary, anticapitalist feminist commitments. We believe these narratives are necessary at this historical moment, as they help sustain radical struggles against neoliberal, transnational capital, carceral, national-security-driven nation-states, and the rise of racist, right-wing, authoritarian regimes in the United States and around the world. The seven scholar-activists featured here speak about their different and similar place-based genealogies of political engagements in anticapitalist, antiracist, anti-imperialist, LGBTQ, women's liberation, and indigenous feminist movements in the United States, Canada, Mexico/Latin America, India, and the Asian and African diasporas. Individually, and collectively, these scholar-activists illustrate the deep and significant connections between the personal and the political by (1) mapping their histories of coming of age within deeply oppressive, racist, colonialist, and heteropatriarchal geopolitical contexts and (2) describing their journeys within social justice movements that anchor their analytic and theoretical frameworks and vision for economic justice. The stories are testament to Amina Mama's claim in chapter 5 that people are transformed within movements: "Our movements have inequalities within them, because we are formed in conventional, classed societies. Within movements we have to change ourselves as well as achieve things for women."

All seven women have been or are connected to the academy in their various landscapes—Angela, Margo, Zillah, and Minnie Bruce in the United States; Himani in Canada and India; Amina in Nigeria, the UK, South Africa, and now the United States; and Aída in Mexico. All of them have been involved in multiple social justice movements, sometimes in key leadership roles, and all have produced knowledge that has had an impact on a broad range of intellectual and political projects. Archiving these stories, then, is a political project about challenging mainstream narratives of feminism, of communism and "the left," and mapping the complexity of identity-based social movements, and of intellectual and political work in the academy. Often, mainstream

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narratives separate intellectual work from activist or movement work. Sometimes these are narratives where the production of knowledge, or intellectual production, is seen as institutionalized and abstracted from what is happening on the ground. However, much of our own work, and that of our sister-comrades, has been about figuring out those connections and being completely convinced that because communities struggle on the basis of ideas and visions of justice and equity, the intellectual and political work of knowledge production is always key to all forms of social movements and resistance. Thus, we talk about the individual place-based stories and narratives of coming of age as politicized feminists in different communities and parts of the world, but we also highlight what these reflections say about the movements on the ground and the geopolitical, ideological, as well as intellectual and political context in which these anticapitalist frameworks were generated. We draw attention to how particular kinds of connections across borders are made, and we suggest how this kind of thinking and activism leads to an expansive imagination of what radical transformation needs to be.

So for the sisters who have contributed to this book, their experiences pushed them into activism, and those experiences came out of particular locations, their own genealogies, and their commitment to be part of a liberation movement. So much of this is organic for them, but then there is a kind of unspoken, unmapped solidarity that we can now recognize existed. Thus, for instance, at the time when Angela and Margo are engaged in developing some of the key theoretical frameworks of Black anticapitalist feminist politics, Himani is engaged in a critique of the deeply patriarchal frames of postcolonial communist cultures in Bengal, and the racialized parameters of feminist movements in Canada. Similarly, Amina develops her feminist critique of the patriarchal, militarized postcolonial African state in the context of left, anticolonial, anticapitalist movements in Nigeria and the UK, and Aída comes to understand the misogynist politics and culture of the Mexican left and goes on to anchor her own scholarship and activism in collaborations with indigenous women in Latin America. In addition, like Angela, Zillah comes of age as a white woman in a communist, antiracist household engaged in the civil rights movement in the

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United States, while Minnie Bruce struggles with a deeply racist landscape in the US South, developing a radical antiracist feminist politics within the context of the women's liberation and gay liberation movements in the 1960s and '70s. In each of these cases, our sister-comrades develop theoretical frameworks and activist commitments that are clearly connected to larger social movements on the horizon—in each case these frameworks arise from particular sociopolitical and cultural contexts but are not bound by these contexts. These genealogies are important—not because they are comprehensive, not because they are universal, not even because these are extraordinary women, but because as scholar-activists they emerge out of certain historical moments in particular geopolitical sites, and they reflect, theorize, analyze, and engage in movements that are concretely based in those historical landscapes but illustrate that forms of connections, crossing borders, and solidarities are possible.

After all, this is how Margo, Angela, Himani, Minnie Bruce, Amina, Aída, and Zillah live their lives. And this is what Taveeshi, our youngest sister scholar-activist, having worked closely with us on this project, picks up on in her "Postscript" on the politics of refusal and hope. So this volume is as much about living a politically conscious life as theorizing what happens in movements, or being an activist, or being a scholar, or being both—and feminism is a key ingredient. As Zillah Eisenstein (chapter 8) says, "My hope is for a deeply revolutionary antiracist feminism that embraces the complexity of the new meanings of racism and the new meanings of a misogyny that are no longer homogeneous categories. . . . Given the different layers of class, and therefore of different experiences of gender and race, it seems to me if we do not come to that complexity, we cannot have a feminism that matters, and for me feminism is the heart of any possibility."

The Urgency of a Decolonial, Anticapitalist, Antiracist Resistance

This is a time when the multiple communities we hold dear are engaged in some of the most urgent struggles of our times. In the United

States, Europe, India, Africa, and Latin America, there are struggles against fascism, Islamophobia, and corporate greed; struggles against racism, police brutality, immigrant and migrant rights, and deportation. In the United States, we see struggles against the proposed “Muslim ban” and its impact on academic communities; struggles for health care and reproductive rights; struggles for economic justice; prison abolition struggles; the Movement for Black Lives and its multiple incarnations across the United States and Europe; struggles for disability rights; struggles for indigenous land rights and sovereignty; the January 2017 Women’s March, which was the largest mass mobilization of women in the United States, with sister marches around the world (followed by the similar January 2018 women’s marches); the women’s strike on International Women’s Day (March 8, 2017) calling for a feminism for the 99 percent; an antiracist, anticapitalist, anti-imperialist feminism that takes on the proto-fascist shift of our political landscapes now; and so on. In the academy, of course, we face the increasing corporatization and militarization of university practices and the commodification and privatization of social justice claims. At the time of this writing, Donald Trump has been in office for a year, and since his inauguration we have witnessed hundreds of protests and rallies focused on a range of issues from education, immigration, water and land justice, reproductive and land rights, workers’ rights, and others in multiple cities and towns across the United States and around the world.

Many of these struggles have feminist and women organizers at the forefront. Feminism matters—a feminism that is anchored in decolonizing, antiracist, anticapitalist, transnational commitments keeps us alive and gives us hope. And that is what this volume illustrates: that it is the creation of alliances and solidarities across gender, race, class, sexual, and national divides that point the way forward. After all, it is often the case that subaltern and decolonizing feminisms in different national contexts have more in common with one another than with mainstream feminisms in their own contexts. The stories of the feminist scholar-activists in these pages provide us with analytic tools, strategies, and modes of organizing and building trans-

national communities of struggle that we desperately need in these times when there are claims to so-called alternative facts, and when all forms of racial, religious, gender, and class discrimination are normalized by authoritarian regimes in countries around the world.

Building social movements in this era of neoliberal capitalism requires coalition building across differences that many of the participants in this volume speak about. This is an urgent moment in which neoliberal structures and practices have been particularly virulent against the work of anticapitalist, antiracist feminists. All of the sister-comrades here share a common understanding of how the governance practices of the neoliberal capitalist state have negatively impacted and continue to impact their own lives and work and that of their individual and collective communities and thus why resistance is urgent and necessary.

As scholar-activists they are acutely aware that whether they are in the richer Global North, where most are currently located, or in the comparatively poorer Global South, they are engaged in necessary anticapitalist, antiracist feminist struggle that is circumscribed by the ruling relations of the US state and its global economic hegemony and sphere of influence. This is manifested as oppressive (sometimes violent) state practice whether in the North or the South. These “national security” corporatized states confront us through hostile relations and actions that threaten to erase all the gains that emancipatory social movements have made over the last forty-plus years.

Forms of neoliberal governance structures have devastated the lives of the most marginalized peoples in both the North and the South, and it is not accidental that most of their victims are poor people and people of color, the populations that all of the sister-comrades here are committed to or work with directly. This is what is central in all of the narratives in this book: working against states that have no moral or ethical compass and for which the elimination of the working class is thought of as nothing more than market necessity. Witness the current debate on affordable national health care in the United States. The key factor being considered is not who can access or afford health care but how many millions of people the government can afford to make expendable from the health-care rolls to save costs.

At the national and transnational level, in the Global North and South, the state rules through armed machinery the likes of which have never been seen before. Aída Hernández-Castillo (chapter 6) talks about the links between the Mexican state and organized crime, and Amina Mama (chapter 5) describes the militarized (masculinized, heterosexual) African nation-state as one of the most important targets of engagement for African feminists. These are violent states, yet in the North, specifically in the United States, as we witnessed with the heavily armed police forces overseeing some of the women's marches immediately following the election of Donald Trump, the message communicated to the resisters to explain away the show of force was that the state has to build "security" to protect the homeland. Discourses of "safety of the motherland" mobilized by neoliberal nation-states are profoundly racialized whether they target Black, Brown, or Muslim bodies in the United States or Muslim and Dalit bodies in India. The message is clear and reminds us that this is armed struggle, but only one side is allowed to be armed. Indeed, there is a fundamental difference in the meaning of armed struggle as practiced by the neoliberal state where the primary goal is decimation of the working classes. As Himani Bannerji asserts cogently when speaking of armed resistance in class struggle, "Violence is what the ruling oppressors do; armed struggle is what the resisters do. It would be impossible to make both into the same."

It is in this ultraliberal capitalist moment that Himani speaks of the false ideological notion of "you-can-be-who-you-want-to-be" that undermines any recognition of class struggle. However, our sister-comrades understand that this is what is still taking place as the so-called market forces render more and more of the working classes disposable. Class, together with race and gender, remains the primary factor in the question of social justice. From the persistent police shootings of unarmed Black people to the institutional racism that denies victims' families justice in many of the cases, class struggle remains at the heart of state violence. In the academy the language of class struggle is no longer popular. While discursive change can reformulate ideas for social change, discourse itself does not lead to

social change. It is activism that must accompany the ideas that will force such change. Through all the mutations of capitalism, the parameters of social justice have not changed, and thus neither can our commitment to maintaining class struggle.

Building Coalitions and Solidarity across Struggles

Through the intensification of neoliberalism and increasingly militarized state regimes, it follows that the politics of coalition building is even more necessary now than in the past. In earlier periods when our sister-comrades came of age in struggles against the state, oppressed groups came to some shared understanding of their commonalities. Today, however, because of neoliberalism's intense focus on the individual and the market, it is more of a challenge for groups to recognize their commonalities and work to build coalitions and solidarities across common differences. The feminist frameworks that shaped the activism that our sister-comrades speak of here illustrate some of the strongest moments of coalition activism today, most notably in the Movement for Black Lives. This is a coalition that the US state has noted as threatening, and that speaks to the success of the movement forcing the state to reckon with the multiple levels of oppression it forces on all marginalized peoples.

Similarly the State of Israel is threatened by the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions) movement for justice in Palestine, framing it as dangerous and targeting US and European scholar-activists involved in Palestine solidarity work, especially in the academy. As Minnie Bruce Pratt says here, the Black Lives Matter movement teaches us many lessons about solidarity. "Not easily won solidarity, but growing solidarity and a kind of dropping of illusions—the illusions around capitalist democracy, what it is going to give people, and then an opening to ask, 'If that's not working, then what?'" It offers "a lot of questions and desire to talk about other possibilities." In looking at the increasing numbers of people who are being further marginalized by losing their jobs, losing health care, being squeezed by enveloping

poverty that forces them to sell personal effects, solidarity pushes people's backs against the wall, and Minnie Bruce asks, "What happens when those people start getting together to push back?" This is a crucial moment in neoliberal capitalism when marginalized communities are beginning to receive the support of many of the not-so-marginalized—those who recognize that the state is a violent and unfair institution that deploys cruelty as a measure of social control.

Thus we recognize with excitement the strength of coalition building that takes the "politics of refusal" Taveeshi Singh refers to in her "Postscript" to a new level: that of solidarity across borders of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and differential abilities. It is the ability of all oppressed groups to see their common struggles that will further strengthen the understanding of the need to come together. Minnie Bruce captures this clearly when she says, "To me, the challenge is more organizational. How does one build, from the ground up, and from that generational gap of people who have been through this struggle before? How does one build those connections to put together some structures that can endure through the kinds of changes that are necessary for people to affirm each other and still stay together in struggle?"

A potential response to this question of solidarity lies in the deeply feminist praxis of conscientization and self-growth in the context of collective struggle. Margo Okazawa-Rey captures this best in chapter 1 when she says, "We as feminists need to develop a methodology that includes a much more conscious way to think about personal growth, personal development, dealing with the contradictions we face in our lives—in the ways in which we have not taken care of each other and of ourselves."

To forge true solidarity, we have to move beyond individual identities and single-issue politics. Margo believes we have to have a collective vision to make struggle meaningful and successful:

I think about principles, and one of the principles has to be the principle of connectivity—staying connected and moving through various tensions, conflicts, and contradictions in a way where we stay committed to being connected. . . . By connectivity, I mean a

commitment and a practice. Not just a commitment but a practice to work together to understand and dig deeper, to work together to engage conflicts in very generative and creative ways, and to not give up on each other unless it is the absolute last resort.

It is this solidarity that the sister-comrades in this volume speak and practice. As Sara Ahmed says, this is what it means to live "a feminist life."

Wonderful Thinking: On Imagination, Courage, and New Feminist Horizons

Rather than summarizing the radical and inspiring ideas that point to new horizons, we conclude this introduction by quoting at length from each of our sister-comrades. Their words exemplify the courage, critical analysis, hope, and revolutionary feminist praxis that constitute the spirit of this book.

Margo Okazawa-Rey (chapter 1) introduces us to the tools of what she calls "wonderful thinking":

Engaging in "wonderful thinking" requires us first to create popular-education gatherings—intergenerational, multi-identities, cross-issue, cross-sector—wherever we are located, whenever possible, across geographies. To share local knowledges and personal experiences; to look deeply into and through differences and identities that consistently divide; to apply various critical theoretical perspectives, including socially lived theories; and to generate collective identities, shared structural analyses, and compatible visions of justice, sustainability, and genuine security are radical, potentially transformative acts. . . .

The current political moment, more than ever, demands us to understand, above all, our deepest yearnings.

Angela Y. Davis (chapter 2) pushes this thinking across difference and divides by talking about connectivities among issues and movements, defining how we need to resist:

The potential success of this resistance will certainly depend on the willingness of organizers and participants to insist on the kind of

intersectional approach to social justice that has been encouraged by antiracist and anticapitalist feminists over the last two decades. It will depend on the recognition, for example, that water is a feminist issue and that our solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux as they fight to protect their water (and their land and culture) must also be extended to those who live in Flint, Michigan, as well as in Occupied Palestine, who are also fighting for their water, their lives, and their sovereignty.

As we resist, we must never forget why we are resisting.

What we need, then, is a capacious imagination and the ability to create community across social and economic justice struggles.

Minnie Bruce Pratt (chapter 4) thinks deeply about the power of the imagination, including the ways our imaginings have been, distorted and truncated by power:

One of the things I understood as I was doing antiracist work was how profoundly my imagination had been distorted by white supremacy. . . .

So for me, antiracist work has been organizing and being demanding of myself in relation to my writing that I not replicate white supremacy in how I do my work. The only way that has changed . . . is in collective work, in actual on-the-ground work, with people of color, women of color, antiracist white people, people who are opposed to capitalism, opposed to profiting off of other people's labor and bodies.

As I went through that process, my ability to imagine differently was changed, and other possibilities opened up to me. . . . It was not individual imagination that made it happen. It was collective imagination, collective hope, and also the springing from moment to moment of collective work together, so that with each step and each spring forward, another possibility opened up.

Zillah Eisenstein (chapter 7) reflects on honesty and the ethics of antiracist, anti-imperialist coalitions and white feminist allies:

At this point I trust the world to keep me honest and fully involved in trying to find out what an antiracist, anti-imperialist feminism really looks like. . . .

I wonder what is going to happen for those of us who are committed to an anti-imperial framework. What is going to be our re-

sponsibility here? To do something and to say something. And then also, what is the responsibility of white women within the different women's movements—because we don't have a unified one—in trying to negotiate an honest coalition that asks more than for me to be an ally, that asks for me to be an active participant in the struggle?

Amina Mama (chapter 5), in looking to the future, talks about an “institutional” approach that challenges and transforms oppressive structures at many levels:

We need to transform institutions, from families through community and government structures, all the way up to global governance structures, so that no terrain is neglected. The plus side of that is that you can be an activist wherever you are. This institutional approach is a different idea of activism, very different from social movement approaches, or revolutionary struggles for state power. In a way, maybe this is something that feminism has contributed to the meaning of politics: a deep understanding of the pervasiveness of power, and its productivity. Resistance to oppression can and does take root in almost any institution, any oppressive situation. It is down to movements to bring things together, so the will to strengthen movements comes from an optimistic viewpoint.

Aída Hernández-Castillo (chapter 6) reflects on the role of scholar-activists and what it means to enter a situation without “the truth”:

With many of these decolonial critiques to ourselves as intellectuals, one issue is that my truth as a feminist of what is emancipation and what is justice is not necessarily what they imagine or what they want. So to arrive to the space of encounter, open to a dialogue in which I am willing to destabilize my certainties, is not as powerful as arriving with “the truth.” It is a lot easier to get there with “the truth” than to get there and say, “Well, I just want to see what can we build.”

Finally, Himani Bannerji (chapter 3) thinks deeply about what it means that capitalism in its neoliberal phase has created the global crisis-ridden toxic environment that threatens democracy as an emancipatory tool of struggle:

All aspects of democracy that seem to have become fragile these days must be treasured and fought for. Connections between so-

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cial movements ranging over large fields must be mapped up, and solidarity among struggles is critical. Capitalism's expansion into a total socioeconomic and political form requires an equally total network of resistance. It is in this process that we will be able to resolve the relations between race, gender, and class in a political and imaginative manner.

Chapter Structure

Each chapter begins with a section called "Coming of Age" followed by responses to our questions about each scholar-activist's feminist activism and its impact, specific challenges they face in doing this work, their thinking about border crossings and building solidarities, and their vision for the future. Each chapter ends with a section titled "Further Reflections: Imagining a Revolutionary Feminist Politics," focusing on the authors' responses to the following question:

How would you communicate urgent political and social developments on the horizon in the United States and other parts of the world to generations of younger scholars and activists? We want you to think about this in the context of US political hegemony, the upcoming elections and possible futures; immediate and urgent social justice concerns around migrants, refugees, racism, neoliberal and carceral nation-states, Islamophobia, sexual violence, police brutality, war, occupation, and the rise of misogynist religious fundamentalist movements globally, and also new intersectional movements of resistance like Black Lives Matter and Standing Rock that are located in North America but have had global reverberations.

Our hope is that these stories of Feminist Freedom Warriors inspire and sustain the reader and that they provoke bold, thoughtful, and courageous feminist activism and coalitions in these times, which can often feel more precarious than in the recent past. It is the reason we say, quite seriously, *A Luta Continua!*



No Freedom without Connection

Envisioning Sustainable Feminist Solidarities

Margo Okazawa-Rey

Coming of Age: Margo's Story

Margo Okazawa-Rey: I think I am the classic the-personal-is-political example; by that I mean I started my life journey in a transnational context, in a sense, by the way my parents met. My father was part of the US occupying force in post-World War II Japan, working-class, a conscript for the "war effort"; my mother was part of the occupied, upper-middle class, the college-educated daughter of Japanese corporate executive. My own birth signifies, or I personify, something that was not supposed to exist at that historical moment.



Searching for Truth in Community

Aída Hernández-Castillo

Coming of Age: Aída's Story

Aída Hernández-Castillo: I am part of a generation of Mexican feminists like many of my friends that arrived at feminism through the left. We started to be activists mainly in the anti-systemic struggle of the eighties, when Central America was very important in our struggle. When I was seventeen years old I arrived in Mexico City to study social anthropology, and I became involved in the movement of solidarity with Guatemala. I was working for the Guatemalan press agency that was called Enfoprensa at the time. My first years of political activism were very linked to the struggle in Central America, more specifically in Guatemala. I started to get involved politically but

very close to a sector of the left that was very critical of institutional politics. I was only seventeen; I was very young.

Each of us had a political adviser (*responsable politico* was the term we used in Spanish) who were our political teachers within the political organization, and they were very concerned with feminism being an ideology that divides people. It was a very masculine Che Guevara kind of ethics. In those times the women in academia that declared themselves feminist were upper-middle-class women who were very centered on their struggle in the pro-choice agenda. I did not identify myself with these kinds of women. At the same time the struggle that was a priority for us was the genocide of indigenous people in Guatemala. So the pro-choice agenda was the last of my concerns. For many years I was not a feminist. I could even say that I was anti-feminist, because I was against that limited feminist agenda.

When I finished my undergraduate studies, I moved to Chiapas. I started to work in the refugee camps there, and I got very involved with the Maya indigenous women that were Guatemalan refugees. We were working with popular education methodology, trying to figure out how to create a critical consciousness, but also how to build a community in exile. I became a very good friend with another woman who studied education at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México [National Autonomous University of Mexico]. She was my roommate. In 1988 she was kidnapped by federal police and gang-raped. This experience marked my life. When she came back home, we went to the legal authorities, the Ministerio Público—the public attorney—and the way she was treated by the justice bureaucrats was awful. Somebody told us that she was not the only case of sexual violence by security forces that had occurred in those days, so we put an advertisement on the local radio inviting women that had had any problems with sexual violence and did not find justice in the state legal system to get together in a coffeehouse in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Around seventy women arrived. Some of them had been raped by police forces, others by their own relatives; some were indigenous women that had been expelled by the political bosses (*caciques*) of their communities after being raped. We had to move to a house because there was not enough space in the

coffeehouse. This was the beginning of the first feminist organization in which I participated. I realized that it was very difficult to continue working for social justice without considering what we now call “intersections”—the effects of different systems of violence that we were experiencing. But it took a long time for me to declare myself a feminist.

We created an organization that was called Grupo de Mujeres de San Cristóbal de Las Casas, and we had a women’s shelter that was self-sustained with our own personal funding. Indigenous and non-indigenous women worked together, some of them from Mexico City, some from Chiapas. Many of the feminist decolonial theories that we are now discussing came to my heart and mind through my practice in those years, because I saw that political activism centered on class, and antistate struggle was not considering race and gender; it was leaving something out. A lot of methodologies that we were using against violence were methodologies that we took from the experiences of feminist organizations in Mexico City. For example, our main strategy was a legal strategy using the state justice institutions, and many of the women that came to our shelter were indigenous women that were dealing with customary law in their communities. And we had a team of feminist lawyers that knew nothing about customary law. I started to challenge the ways in which the feminist strategies we were using were not responding to the specific needs of a very diverse cultural area in which we lived. In that search I found Chandra’s work, among other feminist readings by women of color, and thought about how it was another form of colonialism to go to a place and say that “we all have to do this or that.” We were all volunteers at that time. For example, the lawyer was a very ethnocentric lawyer, and she probably had a racist attitude towards many of the women that came to the shelter; she considered the cultures they were from as backward cultures. But at the same time, she had been working for free for them for fifteen years. It is not that easy just to dismiss her work.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty: Because these are also people who are working and have given labor without recognition for a long time. But what you are talking about, Aída, is more so. While we want to

acknowledge the integrity of individuals who are doing this work with the best of intentions, there is a disconnect between what they are doing and what they see as good work, and what the larger collective or community actually needs the work to be like, especially if you reproduce colonial paradigms. This is why knowledge is so dangerous sometimes.

AHC: So how can we build bridges? I always say to my friends that good theory helps good practice, and that having a more complex perspective of how those intersections work helps us to look for various strategies. Because if what we want is a better life for the women with whom we work, we do not want to gain legal cases. That should not be the main objective but the well-being of the women. You can gain a case, and when the woman goes back to her community, she is isolated or stigmatized because she did not consider the elders or the communitarian justice system; she just went to the state law. So we have to see what kind of strategies we can build.

We have something to offer from academia to these kinds of projects. I proposed to them a workshop in which indigenous women who worked in accompanying cases of domestic violence and who were, for example, rural teachers, nurses, or midwives (because women that are victims of domestic violence usually go to those women that have some kind of power in the community) could teach our legal team how customary law was treating those cases. The legal team would then teach this group of women how to make a legal case if they wanted to go to the state law. The proposal was to have a dialogue of knowledge about different legal systems to search for intercultural strategies towards justice for women. I did not know anything about the state law or customary law, so for me it was a learning experience on both sides.¹

CTM: Was this still in Chiapas?

AHC: Yes. In the end they decided to create a network of anti-violence women's rights promoters among women of different communities. Many of them were from different indigenous groups and

regions, so they worked in isolation, a context that makes them very vulnerable. Because in many cases, getting involved in a case of domestic violence of somebody else is considered in their communities as just being gossipy. So the network gave them some protection; they were less isolated in their defense of women's rights.

With the lawyers it was more difficult, because the lawyers' community is very close-minded; I always say they are like a closed ethnic group. They have their language, and it is very difficult for them to decenter the rule of law as the center of their strategy. I am still working with lawyers a lot, and I have another goal now to try to bring the discussion on legal pluralism and decolonial feminist thinking to the law schools.

More recently, many feminists in Latin America, and in Mexico specifically, have been arguing about how customary law can be against women's rights. They have spent a lot of time struggling against customary law, while at the same time state law, the penal law, is putting a lot of women in prison. There is very little energy left to deal with the problem of imprisonment.

After many years of working with issues that were related to customary law, eight years ago I began to work with the issue of penal law and what I call *racismo judicial*—judicial racism—that is, how racism has marked the access to justice for a racialized woman in Mexico. It is a collective project. What happened is that we were struggling with the issue of customary law because in 2001 there was a law reform in Mexico that recognized the rights of indigenous people to their own justice system. Many feminists started to scream publicly that such a recognition meant going backwards in women's rights, that it would open the possibility for women's rights to be violated by indigenous justice systems. In this debate they barely included the voices of indigenous women. They rarely included the multiple experiences of indigenous women that are participating in the transformation of their justice system. It became like the Muslim and the veil. They do not call it the "indigenous justice system," but "uses and customs."

We started this project to try to see what women were doing with their own justice system. I worked with a beautiful team of female legal

anthropologists from CIESAS [Center for Research and Advanced Studies in Social Anthropology] that had been working together for a long time (María Teresa Sierra, Mariana Mora, and Rachel Sieder). But when we were working on this project, there was a huge issue with the repression of a peasants' movement that wanted to stop the construction of an airport in communal lands—the Atenco movement.² The police repressed the movement, and seventeen women were raped and put into jail. This event became a scandal because two of the women were foreigners and they gave their testimony of the rapes. It took me to jail for the first time. I went to visit them in jail. One of them was an indigenous woman who was a street vendors' organizer who was at this meeting, supporting the demands of the people of Atenco; her name was Magdalena Garcia Duran. Amnesty International termed her a political prisoner. When I was there I realized there were many indigenous women that were not political prisoners in the strictest sense but that were prisoners of a state policy against drugs that is criminalizing small vendors (*narco menudeo*), people that sell small quantities of drugs and get very high penalties, ten to fifteen years. I started this new stage of my activism and my scholarly work, because I wanted to see who those women were and to document the structural racism of the penal system.

To get entry into the jail was very difficult. I found a feminist poet, Elena de Hoyos, who was teaching creative writing in one of the jails in the Mexican state of Morelos, so I entered through her. I wanted to write the life stories of those women in prison, and one of the writers, an inmate with a Korean background, Suzuki Lee Camacho, told me, "They don't allow you to enter and they don't allow us to go out. We are writers. Why don't you teach us how to write life stories? And we can interview the other inmates and write their stories." This was the beginning of a project that really had a great impact on my life. For eight years I have been working with them. From the first book given to me that was written by hand, we have come a long way; they have written and published twelve books. I helped to correct that first book; that was the result of a dialogue between indigenous and mestizo inmates. I got funding for a publication called *Under the Shadow of the Guamúchil*.³

They decided that they wanted to learn to make books and not just to write them. Marina Ruiz, a feminist editor, started to work with us. She is part of a movement that does art-craft books with recycling materials. She taught a workshop on that. A group was formed from that workshop, the Colectiva Editorial de Mujeres en Prisión Hermanas en la Sombra (Editorial Collective of Women in Prisons, Women in the Shadows).⁴ They write the books, they capture the texts; the entire editorial process is now under their control. We bought two computers. We have a radio program. Inmates that are out continue to be part of the collective. Now part of the struggle is how to impact public policy towards prisons. They are working on that. I have many doubts, because the state is so corrupt. I find it very difficult to imagine that part of my struggle will be for public policy. I prefer more grassroots movements, but there is a sector of the collective that wants to do that.

Linda E. Carty: Because they probably recognize if you can make some kind of positive, progressive change at the level of policy, you can impact so much more. Sometimes we tend to think at the level of grass roots more. We understand how intense that is and how impactful it can be in small time. Working with the state, that is such an organized, intransigent bureaucracy, it is easy to become hopeless because they will not change very easily.

AHC: In Mexico the state is so linked to organized crime. The people that you deal with as bureaucrats can also be part of a cartel, so it is very difficult. Something else that happens very easily is that they pass repressive laws and then use progressive laws that have to do more with cultural politics to distract public opinion from the repressive legislation. They even pass the two kinds of laws at the same time. This just happened two weeks ago. On the Day Against Homophobia, the president of Mexico promoted a law advancing LGBT rights and legalizing same-sex marriage. It was a big issue in all the newspapers. The presidential palace was tinted with rainbow colors, and radical activists of the LGBT movement were taking pictures of themselves with the president, Enrique Peña Nieto, with the presidential palace behind them. That same

week the president sent a law to Congress in which he gave the military the right to enter into many civilians' issues. It is this game in which you think that you are getting something, but you do not know whether you are really advancing in your struggle for justice or if you are being used.

CTM: The law that was passed was really a law that gives impunity to the state and the military to walk in and criminalize a whole set of actions that may not have been seen as criminal behavior before.

AHC: When the army commits an illegal act or violates human rights with a civilian, they have to be judged by civilian law. With the new legislation, the army members are going back to their military courts. For example, if the army thinks that a civilian is involved in some criminal act that has to do with the army, they can interview the civilian; they can take them to their military camp. So we are losing ground again. That law that made this legal was passed in the same week as all the discourse on sexual diversity—on the seventeenth of May 2016. When I say that sometimes it is very difficult to try to impact state institutions, it is not that I am completely against the idea of working for changes in public policy, because in Latin America as well as the United States, there is a big split between what is called “institutional feminism” and radical feminism, and they have been struggling for a long time. It is not that I have a principle that I would never work with institutions. Rather, the issue is, What kind of institutions do we have when we have a state that works like the Mexican state does in this specific historical moment?

LEC: One of the questions that we have is about what kinds of challenges you have encountered in the work, and you have laid out enormous challenges. What have been some of the strategies you have tried, not just personally but collectively with the groups that you work with, to overcome some of these challenges?

AHC: There are many things. I am part of a network that is called La Red de Feminismos Descoloniales.⁵ We are several scholar-activists

and we are trying to work more with media. I have a column in a national newspaper called *La Jornada*, in which I write a monthly article on issues related to gender violence and women's struggles for justice.⁶ We are trying to use more multimedia. There is a feminist TV channel on the internet. The program is called *Luchadoras* (Fighters)⁷, which has opened its space to our network. We are trying to diversify the textual strategies that we use to go beyond the book. That is one area in which we are working.

The other area is political alliances, which is a big challenge all over. There is a lot of tension in Mexico over political alliances, because recently more people have died in the “war against drugs” in Mexico than in the war in Iraq. Violence and disappearance are the main problems in Mexico. We have to work with the parents of the disappeared, men and women, and many of them are not feminists. For example, the forty-three students from Ayotzinapa that disappeared came from a leftist teacher's culture that has a discourse, practice, and performance that is very “Che Guevara style.”⁸ Many feminists do not want to work with them. I think there is a moment in which we must articulate our differences, when we have to confront the issue of state violence and the narco state.

As feminists, for example, one issue that we have to deal with is that the people that are linked to drug issues, like many of the inmates, are women who are very vulnerable because nobody wants to defend somebody that can be linked to a cartel. So if you are a feminist, you are not going to use your energy to work with these women. You will prefer to work with political prisoners or with the issue of criminalization of abortion. Nobody wants to get involved with issues of drugs—not the human rights organizations, not the feminist organizations. The majority of women that are being killed or that are in prison are women that did not have choices. The cartels go to communities, kidnap women, and they are forced to go. Many times, when the police capture a criminal group, the group “sacrifices” the women and leaves. Let me explain it: If the police capture a criminal group, which includes, say, three women, the group hands over three women and money to the police, and it leaves. So the men who

were responsible for getting the women involved are free, while the women are in prison.

It is very difficult to have sensitivity towards this kind of situation for many reasons. One of them is that the images of what the cartels have done are very bloody, and you do not want to get involved with them at all. If those women were linked in any way to the cartels, you do not want to get close to them. However, now I know them by name. I know their life stories, I know how they were captured and how vulnerable they are, and it is not just those that are in prison. The feminicide rate in Mexico is very high, and many of the women killed were women that were captured, taken away, and then murdered. This is a moment in which human rights organizations and feminist organizations have to build alliances. Right now we are living in a situation of emergency, and we need to build bridges among different social struggles. There are contexts in which you might say, "Ah, no, this Che Guevara-style man, I don't want to work with him. I'm sick of him. I have done it before. I don't want to deal with him." But in a situation of emergency we need to deal with our differences and build something. After the Ayotzinapa case, we have been working a lot trying to get together with different kinds of groups. What are we going to do together? How can we build this? That is my work now.

LEC: What kind of feminist work is being done with the women in prison? For example, the captured group pays for the crime with three women and some money. Something must happen in the minds of those women after they are incarcerated, and they have been there for a long time, and they are thinking about how they were discarded and how they became like objects. On the left we used to say in the old days that when people go to work in the same environment it conscientizes the workers. Some kind of conscientization probably happens to those women. Is there any hope of working with the incarcerated women?

AHC: In the case of the Colectiva Hermanas en la Sombra, that is the work we have been doing for eight years. The writing at the beginning, in the first book they published, was a genealogy of violence. It was

about how they suffered; how they were raped as children, then raped as teenagers; how they were abused by their husbands, raped by the police, and tortured in jail. It was just violence, violence, and violence. After they took all the violence out, they started to write about empowerment, building community, and what it means to be together, using poetry but also playing with words in different ways. They have a book of poetry and one of narratives that talks a lot about the experience of building a community and what it means when you discover that you are not alone. They have many books now that are about consciousness raising or consciousness awareness. Conscientization is happening—not everywhere, but many of the incarcerated women are building community. A project that they are working on with a non-inmate member of the *colectiva*, Carolina Corral, a visual anthropologist, is an animated short film about romantic love and the dangers of romantic love. It is entitled *Amor Nuestra Prisión* (Love: Our Prison). It is very funny. They are working on a draft. Some of the members of the *colectiva* that are outside right now are working in other prisons, taking the methodology of building community in prison.

CTM: What is interesting, though, about this project and the early project in Chiapas are some of the threads there are about coming together across various forms of differences—class, ethnicity, dispossession, wealth, professionalization, and other kinds of peasant experiences—and actually finding ways to build community and culture. Part of the critique of why the "Che Guevara-ism" and other forms of left social movements and organizing do not work is because there is not enough attention paid to the kinds of cultures that social movements generate. If those cultures end up being profoundly violent, masculinist cultures, they automatically alienate groups of people. But when you come across differences, sit around a table, and create certain things together—like in this project, when people write poetry and create a video together, or in the earlier project, when people across divides actually teach each other what forms of justice are seen as the right forms of justice—there is a new culture that is created, which is about how you sustain each other. And you do not have to become

each other. Audre [Lorde] used to say you do not have to become each other in order to work together, but in order to work together you have to actually do something more than just mobilize against external violence and structural injustice; you have to build something together.⁹

AHC: I have an anecdote from this project that relates to that. The first book they published is called *Under the Shadow of the Guamúchil*. Guamúchil is the only tree in the jail. Everything is cement, and there was one tree. All the rural women and the indigenous women were under the shadow of the Guamúchil doing art-crafts. There is no middle class there. All the urban women with some kind of schooling were taking the courses, seminars, and yoga classes, because there are many things happening in jail. We decided to do the writing workshop under the shadow of the Guamúchil. That is where we got together. Many of them had never been together in the same space in jail, because inside the jail it is very segregated. People that have more schooling would be able to take more courses and would be more interested in those kinds of things. The way we worked is that the women worked with each other during the week, telling the story, and one person was writing it. Once a month we read aloud a story. Reading aloud was a moment of community building. You can tell a story to somebody, but when you listen aloud to your own story being read by this other person, it is a very emotional moment. It was also an opportunity to discuss issues of racism within the jail, because part of the stories were about how a woman felt when she arrived here and she did not speak Spanish and everybody was making fun of her.

In these rituals of community building, two urban women asked the rural women for forgiveness for the way they had treated the rural women before. In Mexico we do not use the word "racism" a lot. They more easily say "discrimination." But the notion that if you are an indigenous rural woman, you have a "backward culture" is a racist issue. The women came to a point where they could finally say, "We can share our differences, but we also see our own violence, the way we have exercised violence against all others that are different than us." In the end some of their books had to do with their life stories

but also with their dialogues. What does it mean for me to be able to talk to you? What do I learn from you? They were able to write what they wanted, and in the middle they said, "Well, I always thought that I had suffered a lot, and now I realize how privileged I have been even when I am here," and they started off discussing.

You are right. A very important part for political mobilization is to be able to build community. A community of solidarity is a big challenge, because the foundation of many of these neoliberal states is to individualize, divide, and split. Now there is a huge debate in Latin America (and there was a conference organized by some activists as well) about the commons that goes beyond the indigenous communities,¹⁰ because in Latin America there has always been a link between communality, the common areas and rural areas. There are ongoing efforts in urban areas strategizing how to rebuild these commons. Jail seems like one of the spaces that is totally against solidarity and the commons, but there are things going on in those spaces too.

LEC: The individualism of neoliberalism creates divisions, and we have to figure out how to cross those divisions. We create collectivity, and out of that we get community that creates collective action on some level. The old leftist model of what I will now call Guevara-ism made that really effective. There are all these communities that can come together under a shared knowledge and understanding of who the enemy is, and the enemy is the ruling class. That has been very effective moving across divisions, because there is one central enemy. If we understand that, then we are all working towards something that can benefit everybody. But with individualism there is no possibility of having a collective action. You can have little collectivities here and there, but you cannot have something larger. The work of groups of inmates you described is effective and powerful. It is phenomenal that these women are writing such books in prison.

What is your hope of that becoming something larger? How do we get it beyond where it is now? The question is not for you personally but something larger that I am thinking about, because as an old-guard leftist I see what the positives were, but I completely

disagreed with how they worked. I felt disgusted that there was no understanding of the woman question. Even when we tried to engage that, we had to confront many things. I see the failures of feminism in that way.

AHC: Before I answer your question, I want to articulate another challenge. As you said, before, we knew who the enemy was. The intellectual or the activist knew the right message that he or she wanted to bring to the collective space of popular education, and there was a lot of epistemological arrogance in that attitude. It was a truth that he/she had, that he/she would bring to that space to raise the consciousness of those people. It was a great group of very committed people, but there were many things going on in that exchange. With many of these decolonial critiques to ourselves as intellectuals, one issue is that my truth as a feminist of what is emancipation and what is justice is not necessarily what they imagine or what they want. So to arrive to the space of encounter, open to a dialogue in which I am willing to destabilize my certainties, is not as powerful as arriving with "the truth." It is a lot easier to get there with "the truth" than to get there and say, "Well, I just want to see what can we build."

We have been struggling for years to have a better law against domestic violence, and they do not give a damn about that law, because they do not want their husbands to be in jail for fifteen years instead of two. They want them to work in the community, doing something else. It makes us less powerful as activists, because, at least in my case, I feel that I do not want to go there to share "truth." I want to go there to search together. That makes the figure of the activist less appealing than when you go there with something to share.

I always say that the first step will be to be able to destabilize your certainties and be humble enough to say, "Well, I'm searching." And how do we go from the local to the global? I think those are the big challenges. I was invited to Peru by the University of Social Movements,¹¹ which is being promoted among other people by Boaventura de Sousa Santos.¹² It is linked to the World Forum but is not a university of the World Forum. Their goal is to

bring together people from different social movements—graffiti kids, feminists, Afro-American, autonomous Basque people, and anarchists—to share their struggles and strategies for struggle and to discuss with scholars their differences of activist research work within those movements. For the scholar the question is, Can you translate your knowledge to a language in which social movements can feel identified? What can scholars learn from them? It entails challenging their pedagogical training, and it involves getting together and talking to see what can you do.

There is a breadth of people, from people that are religious, to the anarchist Basque that are very secular and antireligion, to young people that feel that the old popular education methodologists are passé and you have to do graffiti or something in-your-face. It is a challenge, but at least these efforts are happening now. It did not happen when we had our leader that hid the "truth." Now at least we can try to listen and learn to recognize. For example, something interesting happened in an encounter there. One of the elders, a Maya man, who was very active in Guatemala, said, "I never imagined that not liking gay people was hate."

CTM: What is important about this is that it sets up encounters that normally do not get set up. Part of the impact of neoliberalism is to tell us that these are all separate struggles, and to not make it possible, in terms of resources and geographies, for people to talk to each other about any of this. We do get together, and we are hoping that people see what it means to talk about the intersectionality of social movements. We have a long way to go, because mostly people are speaking from their spaces. But if everybody is there in good faith to both speak and listen, then you are right—exactly this kind of impact can happen, and it can happen with individuals who have power in their own social spaces and social movements. So there is a potential here for building, if nothing else, a culture of people who are hearing the way people who are very different from them are engaged in fights for freedom and justice. There is potential to actually approach and strategize what it is they need to do, because most of the time those

kinds of people don't get together. For example, we have feminist conferences where people who identify as feminist come together, and we have the left forum, where almost no feminists end up. So those things are very separate.

AHC: If we could, as scholars in those spaces, explain that the common enemy—that is, this neoliberal capitalist system—is also built with gender inequalities and colonial legacies, then people might see how my struggle becomes your struggle, because if we do not consider racism, we cannot do anticapitalistic work. The issue in those encounters is not only that I have to have solidarity with your struggle, but to be able to see how our struggles are so embedded, and to show it, besides just saying “intersectionality.”

LEC: Show that they're interlinked to the impact on each of us, and all of us, simultaneously.

CTM: Which will then make it a common enemy as well, but a complicated common enemy.

LEC: Because the common enemy then would be within, and not without. It is easier to mark the common enemy without. It is work we would all have to do and *must* do to move to the next step. Aída, looking at what has happened—what you have experienced, the work you have done, what you have lived—and then, looking forward, what kind of society do you envision as tomorrow in Mexico and beyond for women?

AHC: One of the main issues now, besides neoliberalism, is violence. I live in a rural community outside the city of Cuernavaca that has been taken by the cartels. For the last five years, I have been losing people that I care about. A few weeks before I came here my swimming teacher was killed. He was the teacher of my son since a young age, and he was an Olympic swimmer in his youth, and now in his seventies he created a community project to teach local kids to swim.

He was a man that was making a difference in our community, and he was killed resisting a kidnapping.

One of the ideal things that I would like to see is a different kind of society, not just a different kind of state. The sad thing is that this violence has permeated daily life. We have young people killing young people. The community where I live is called Ocotepc. In the late seventies and eighties it was an experiment of the liberation theology to build autonomy, based on ideas of an ecclesiastical community of faith that used the Bible as a tool for social critique. There was a very well known leftist bishop, in the 1970s, Sergio Mendez Arceo, who lived there. He promoted the construction of community, because the best social project of the progressive church is building community, getting people together to read the Bible. You do a critique of the system but also a critique of your life.

One of the reasons I decided to move to this community was because of this history and this genealogy. I bought a house there, and now some of the granddaughters and grandsons of these people are involved with the cartels. Many of them have killed people at fourteen or have been killed. I panic and I ask, How did we lose this collective memory in two generations? What happened? I was interviewing one of the elders one day, and he asked me, “What we did wrong, that we were not able to transmit our values?” Many of those kids, whose parents were poor, are doing those things not out of need or extreme poverty. It is the need for consumption of certain kinds of goods they could not consume. The kind of goods that the media is promoting as “important good to be somebody.”

I would like to see a Mexico in which we can recover the values of dignity and respect for life, in which we can build community together in difference, in which towns like Ocotepc can recover its memory and its legacy of community building. Of course the challenge is a lot bigger than changing the men that govern my country. It goes to the daily life of people. What kinds of values are there? What kind of conception of life and death is there? How can we build respect for the difference between urban and rural, between mestizo and indigenous? We cannot go out to a public space after five o'clock. How can

we recover this? When I was interviewing this elder, he was almost crying, saying, "How can we put this knowledge of those people that built community in the past as a valuable inheritance for the new generations that are here?"

CTM: It is such a poignant way of talking about building new publics when the physical space itself is unavailable because of the everyday violence. Some of the work we are doing is around creating new publics and communities that believe in different values and in a different conception of what it means to be a human being and treat other people with dignity and compassion.

LEC: It seems like what is missing is having a value for life of your own and others. There is such an intense focus on materiality. It reminds me, there are so many little countries in the Caribbean where people are breaking into people's homes just to get what they have.

AHC: I am very concerned and sad about the lack of respect to life and to your own life. Many of those young men have learned since very young that their life has no value, so they can risk their life for an iPhone. If they lose, they die; if they don't, they have an iPhone. They are willing to take many risks, because the sense of time and the sense of history are missing.

Further Reflections:

Imagining a Revolutionary Feminist Politics

AHC: I want to conclude this dialog with a message of optimism and hope for the new generations of feminists who confront the old and new patriarchal practices as well as a more violent and militaristic world. It becomes difficult to do this when we are before the resurgence of right-wing populist nationalisms, which intend to take us back decades in terms of the recognition of women's rights and politics in favor of social justice. However, it is precisely in such moments as we are experiencing now that it is fundamental to maintain

the hope that it is possible to construct other worlds. It is before the imposition of this dystopia that it becomes urgent to build a politics of solidarity among distinct social movements.

Along the breadth and width of the continent, women have mobilized before the right-wing evolution of the nation-states, showing that the feminist movement is a struggle for life and for the survival of the planet. An overview of America—that we have to remember: it is a continent and not a country—we see that the last three years have been marked by the arrival of the right wing into national governments and by women's resistance to these new patriarchal politics. The triumph of Mauricio Macri in Argentina in November of 2015 initiated the cycle of feminist's mobilizations in South America to defend the achievements of the last decades. This right-wing government has initiated the dismantling of social policies in favor of women, thus it disappeared governmental programs and reduced educational and research budgets with respect to gender issues.

Under the slogan #NotOneMore, a wide movement of diverse women has been organized to combat the dismantling of women's health programs, the closing of shelters for victims of gender violence, and the designation of Supreme Court judges who are the enemies of the legalization of abortion, among many other demands. Similar mobilizations took place in Brazil, where the patriarchal coup d'état against President Dilma Rousseff in August 2016 revealed to the public the misogynist and violent nature of the Brazilian right wing. The process of impeachment itself can be considered as sexist and discriminatory, since the representatives who voted against Dilma Rousseff committed irregularities with public funds and are not being investigated for corruption.

One of the most emblematic moments of the impeachment occurred when a right-wing representative dedicated his vote against President Rousseff to Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, torturer and rapist during the military dictatorship, thus mocking the experiences of torture and sexual violence that the ex-president experienced when she was a political prisoner in the 1970s. Brazilian women are now being governed by a cabinet of white men, headed

by the temporary president Michel Temer. This new government has proposed to reverse the political achievements of the feminist movement through projects that define the family as a union of one man, a woman, and their children, prohibiting the discussion of gender in the National Plan of Education and criminalizing abortion for victims of rape and for those who have contracted the Zika virus, as well as eliminating programs of social development and prevention of violence directed toward women.

A similar process was experienced in 2009 in Honduras, when President Manuel Zelaya was demoted during a "soft coup d'état" headed by the National Congress and supported by the United States government. Women then mobilized under the banner "Neither coup d'état nor violence against women," creating the movement Feminists in Resistance. Since then human rights violations have increased, converting Honduras into one of the most dangerous countries in the world for social activists. The murder of the Lenca indigenous leader, environmentalist activist, and feminist Berta Cáceres in March 2016 was a response to the political alliances between the indigenous and the feminist movements in Honduras. Both movements denounced the complicities among transnational companies such as the International Financial Corporation of the World Bank, the energy development company DESA, and the Honduran government. Berta Cáceres's struggle for the defense of collective rights of indigenous peoples, for women's rights, for the respect of Mother Earth, and against the strategies of transnational capital dispossession became a symbol of the importance of joining the multiple levels of struggle. Her political energy and commitment have been an inspiration all over the continent.

In Mexico the so-called war against narcotics has justified the militarization of the country and the creation of a penal state that has criminalized social movements. Femicide continues being a national problem at the same time that violence against women has occurred within the framework of the war against drugs. The use of sexual violence as a repressive weapon against organized women reproduces conventional war strategies that have taken on the most violent forms in the context of the "new informal wars." In this con-

text, the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States in November 2016 gives continuity to a wave of right-wing politics on the continent that has created new contexts of vulnerability and violence against women. In contrast to the Argentinian, Brazilian, or Honduran political processes, the election in the United States is a process in which we did not participate but the consequences of which are affecting all women in the Global South in a profound way.

As a Mexican feminist, I share the concern and feeling of vulnerability that all my co-nationals experience on the other side of the border. At the same time, I share the hope and political energy that was evident in the Women's March, the day after the North American businessman occupied the presidency, which shows that women's response has been proportional to the misogyny, racism, and xenophobia promoted by Donald Trump. It was the greatest of mass demonstrations in the recent history of the United States. Almost a million persons marched in the streets of Washington to remind the president that his politics of hate will not be passively accepted. Responding to the call of feminist organizations and women of color, hundreds of thousands of women and men from different regions of the country traveled to the capital of the United States to manifest their rejection of the new government. There were demonstrations in 670 cities along the width and breadth of the country. The call crossed borders, with parallel events taking place in another 70 cities around the world, from Mexico City to Tel Aviv.

Now, in this time of crisis for leftist political parties and the resurgence of new authoritarianisms, civil society is organizing itself, without political affiliation and in many contexts headed by women who are demonstrating the importance of collective mobilization. In the Women's March on Washington we saw a distinct face of the United States. It was a contrast to the feminists' marches of the decades of the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century that were hegemonized by a liberal rights agenda and headed by white middle-class feminists. These mobilizations were characterized by the widening demand of women's issues and by a different kind of leadership. The principles of unity that circulated in the social networks

in the declaration of the Women's March in Washington ["Guiding Vision and Definition of Principles"] began with three fundamental demands: gender justice, racial justice, and economic justice.¹³

We now know that this declaration was the result of intense negotiations among diverse women's movements, and that fundamental issues such as the recognition of collective rights for indigenous peoples, a demand of Native American women, were left outside the document. In spite of these important silences, it was evident that we are witnessing the expression of a coalition of feminist and women movements that are broadening the conception of what should be considered "feminist concerns." Kamala Harris, an Afro-Indian US-American senator of California, criticized in her speech the limited perspectives on women's issues, pointing out that issues such as the economy, national security, health, and education are all women's issues that are threatened by the entrepreneurial, privatizing, and militaristic perspectives of the new administration.

The misogyny that characterized the electoral campaign of Donald Trump, including the offensive video in which he literally spoke of how to "grab the pussy" of the women he works with, has no precedent in other electoral processes nor in the worst years of US-American conservatism. On the other hand, the now president announced his intentions to terminate the Planned Parenthood program, criminalize abortion, and incarcerate women who voluntarily interrupt their pregnancy. Added to this violence is the danger of new structural violence against women that threatens the social justice achievements of recent decades. From this perspective, the institutional racism that has made possible police violence toward the Afro-American and Latino communities is a feminist concern. The participation of mothers from the movement Black Lives Matters on the presidium of the march reminds us of this perspective. Women from poor neighborhoods of the United States suffer the police violence that kills and criminalizes their children. The declaration of the march denounces the increase of 700 percent of women incarcerated from 1980 to the present. Donald Trump has announced that he will increase police presence in poor neighborhoods, and that he will not

permit "abuse against the police." The economic and violent exploitation against undocumented immigrants is also a feminist concern. "No human being is illegal," chanted the participants in the march. The child Sofia Cruz, daughter of undocumented Mexican immigrants, gave a moving speech, which called for struggling for what is just. "Women are the Wall and Trump is going to pay" could be read on some signs in the march, announcing that women are ready to be a wall of contention against Trump's xenophobic discourse declaring that there will be a deportation of three million undocumented.

The academic and activist Angela Davis reminded us that settler colonialism, militarism, and the expansion of the industrial penitentiary complex are also feminist concerns.¹⁴ The participation of petroleum industry businessmen in Trump's cabinet announces new challenges for Native Americans whose lands continue to be colonized by transnational petroleum companies; such is the case of the Hunkpapa Lakota nation in Standing Rock. The destruction of nature and global warming are also feminists' concerns. Thousands of women have been displaced by natural disasters provoked by climate change or must walk miles to find water because of droughts. The declaration of the Washington march points out: "We believe that the environment and climate must be protected and that our land and its natural resources cannot be exploited for corporate greed or gain—especially at the risk of public safety and health." This feminist agenda, which recognizes the intersection of multiple exclusions that marks women's lives in the United States and in the whole world, has united a multitude of social movements.

These are the mobilizations that allow us to recuperate hope in these times of authoritarianism and violence. They are the Afro-American, Muslim, Native American, Chicana, lesbian, transgender, undocumented workers, university students, and activist women who have become the conscience of the world. They have shown us the importance of constructing political alliances and to go above our differences to place a stop to the politics of violence and death that attempt to force us to return a hundred years in our struggle for social justice.

Feminist Freedom Warriors tells the stories of women of color from the Global South, weaving together cross-generational histories of feminist activism across national borders. These engaging interviews with sister comrades will inform, inspire, and activate the imagination to explore what a just world might look like. Each woman's story illustrates their lifelong commitment to challenging oppressive practices and forming solidarities across borders to transform unjust structures around the globe. The book features interviews with activists from movements spanning the last seven decades in the United States, India, Mexico, Palestine, Nigeria, South Africa, and beyond.

"There are some books that will make a genuine difference because they are drawn from the experiences of those who have made a genuine difference. This is one of those books. By offering reflections from, and conversations between, feminist freedom warriors, this book is a reminder of just how much we need revolutionary, decolonial, anticapitalist, and antiracist feminism; how in fighting against structures, we are fighting for our lives. Each of these accounts of becoming and being feminists committed to radical transformation teaches us just how much we can do from what has been done; how we can make use of our imaginations, words, memories, knowledge, feelings, connections, and alliances in the project of building a more just world. This is a deeply inspiring and inspired collection."

—Sara Ahmed, author of *Living a Feminist Life*

Chandra Talpade Mohanty and **Linda E. Carty** are both feminist scholar-activists and educators at Syracuse University. They have each written and edited widely on gender, race, transnational feminism, and more. Together they produce the Feminist Freedom Warriors digital archive.

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