Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Urmitapa Dutta

Interviewed by Amanda Nkeramihigo & Desirée Salis
Boston College
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts
June 16th, 2024

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AN: Amanda Nkeramihigo, Interviewer
DS: Desirée Salis, Interviewer
UD: Urmitapa Dutta, Interview Participant

AN: So, we will get started. A very simple question: could you please tell us your full name and date of birth?

UD: My name is Urmitapa Dutta, and date of birth is October 14, 1981.

AN: Alright. Tell me a little bit about how you first began to relate to things like feminism, womanism, and other forms of gender or intersectional theory and work.

UD: I think for me, it began really early when I was a child, and I feel very strongly that my mother was my feminist teacher and someone who led me into feminism even before she herself identified as a feminist. I think it's interesting that for her, that identity came in much later in life. And in many ways, as my identity as a feminist was shaping, she began to identify as a feminist herself. But the lessons for me began really early. And I think a fundamental principle of feminism for me, as it was introduced to me through her and seeing, how she was in her life, was about asking questions: not taking things for granted. just because you've been told to do something, or just because you've been, just because things have been laid out for you, told to you that *this is tradition, this is the way that things are done,* to go with that. So, I've always seen her questioning those things. Often in her everyday roles as a partner, as a mother, as a daughter-in-law, there were ways that she was constantly carving out space for herself and struggling to have a voice, I mean, it wasn't easy, given the circumstances that she was under. But for me that was really where it started. And I think I also saw her really struggle with the ways in which she struggled with the fact that she did not have the space to make the kinds of decisions that she would have made if she were more independent or if she had the space to do that. If there were people around her like, if she had friends who were making those kinds of decisions. So, in many ways, she was really ahead of the curve, in relation to her contemporaries, at least in the places that where I was growing up in our family and I saw that struggle. So, I think for me that became…I imbibed that very early in my life. And so, that I think was a really important piece. I also grew up in a context where the society is primarily matrilineal. And that

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was very interesting because it's not that there wasn't any patriarchy, I mean, patriarchy just played out in a different way in a matrilineal context. But there was no dearth of seeing women who were in various kinds of leadership positions and in very unassuming ways. It wasn't a big deal that a woman was in that position, it was just natural. So, I think those kinds of things were really important for me to see that very early in life. And as I grew up, so much of my own experiences and sort of growing up in a context where everything is gendered. I mean, everything *is* gendered, but I think, particularly, in sort of everyday kinds of ways, sort of recognizing that the spaces, even the physical spaces that we were in were not made for young women's bodies. There weren't clean bathrooms that you could go use, when you were on your periods. And that was one of the things that struck me so early. And I used to be so conscious of that, that any time I had to travel for a school competition, or something like that, that the first thing that would come to my mind was to say, *oh, am I going to be on my periods that time*, because travel would be so difficult. So, they were in those ways that I was always questioning sort of, *what is the space that we are in?* But I think the other thing that also really struck me at the time was that these weren't things that you were supposed to be talking about. So, there was something about those tensions about the very fundamental experience of just being who I was, in my body, in the way that I interacted with the world, and how there wasn't a public space for that to be to be talking about that, to be having conversations about that. So, I think those are things that shaped not only my identity as a feminist, but also, just, my experience in the world. And to be thinking about, *how am I going to be in the world*, w*hat am I going to be bringing into the spaces that now I'm in*, given my understanding of the world as it is and given the absences that I keep registering. So, I think that's really been sort of asking questions, absences, asking *who do these absences serve? Who do the expectations of compliance serve?* Those have paved my way to being a feminist.

AN: Great. And how have you merged these values with your work as a psychologist and exactly how does holding feminist values as you do, especially critical feminist values, as I hear them, influence your own research, practice, and even perhaps teaching and policy work?

UD: Absolutely. I don't think I can disentangle those values or those roles. There is no experience of me or no identity of me as a psychologist that is not a feminist. So, I think being a feminist is a very fundamental part of who I am in the world. And I think the question about being a psychologist is complicated because there is so much about the professionalization that's there about, what this identity means. It's not only what it means to me, but it's also, what it means to people around me, how they see me as a psychologist. But for me, this identity or these experiences, all of these different things that I do, is also, are very much shaped by various kinds of racial, gender identity, national politics. It's very intersectional. And I think it's definitely become more sharpened since I came to the US. I first came here for my doctoral program and then, I moved into a faculty position. But it's really, I think I remember it was, I think perhaps in the second year of my graduate school that, that it suddenly struck me that I had begun to identify myself as a woman of colour in a very visceral, in a very real way, that it wasn't just an identity category or a label, but that's how I felt. And I think that was such a powerful moment of

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recognizing the racialization that had happened, a very different racialization from the way that I had been racialized when I was in India. So, that was incredibly powerful. But I think that also really reminded me of what my responsibility is, and what does this mean to the women, to the collectives that I'm a part of. And I'm going to kind of go away a little bit, but come back to your question. I'll share something that happened around 2014, I think that's when it was, to just kind of highlight what this journey was: I was a faculty here at the time, untenured at the time, and I had gone back home. And I mean, I've been working in Northeast India for a really long time, and that was a period during 2014, 2015, that was a period when the armed conflict there, ethnic violence there was - that was one of the worst points in the area where I was born and raised. I mean, that entire region has various histories of armed conflict, but in that specific region, that was one of the really horrific times. The abductions that were happening, the extortions, the killings, all of that. And I had gone back home during that time, and particularly that period was also where there was a lot of violence against women. And this was, and this was coming from multiple fronts: from the state, from the armed insurgent groups. So, part of the work that I was doing at the time or had gone back to do was to really listen to women's stories. Because what was so striking to me was that in all of this happening, women's voices, women's narratives were completely absent from public discourse. Women were present, but they were present very much as a rhetoric, as a discourse, as a leverage. There were different entities that were talking about women. And women's bodies had kind of become the battleground, but without having any voice, without having anything that was women-centred, in terms of what we were hearing. So, I went back there and as I was grappling with all of these things that were happening and really again so, kind of going back to that question of, what are the absences? What are we not seeing? What are we not hearing? It's not that the voices aren't there, but we just aren't hearing them. As I was doing this work, I mean, it was very difficult. And because this was also in the community where I grew up, it was really hard. And I was connected to a centre on my campus, which was a group of women doing different work related to gender. I wouldn't necessarily call it a feminist space, you know? But it was something. And I reached out to them to just share what was going on. And then the way that that unfolded was so revealing to me. Because there was such a way in which the women - and these were women in my own community- it was very clear that they were seen as the victim. And that there was no capacity to see any kind of voice or agency or resistance. So, very much along the lines of, *how do we save these women?* And it was very hard because, I was yearning for support, to feel like I'm part of a collective, especially in the spaces where I work, where I live now. But there was that piece. But I think even more revealing than that was the way that I was kind of seen as helpless in that space. They were concerned about my safety. And I understand that. But there was also no moment of pause to recognize that these were my home spaces. You know that safety isn't a black or white thing, where you decide that *this is safe, so I will do this, and this is unsafe so, I won't do it*, but that the relationships are so entangled, that my family was living there. So, there were all of these complexities. And also, to recognize that, people don't always decide to tell you their story or not, they are not always making decisions based on whether it is safe or unsafe. They take risks. They recognize the risks involved. So, those experiences were very revealing to me, at the time. And I'm sharing that to kind of bring this back to this question of, how do I merge these values, you know? For me, I am

{1:01:45}

always a woman of colour, feminist, and psychologist. So, there is no way that I can disentangle that part of me, of who I am, my experiences in the world from being a feminist or from being a psychologist. So, that's really for me, that's where all of my experiences get configured, in those kinds of interactions and those kinds of intersections, and it's from those spaces that my research happens, you know? So much of my research focuses on the everyday violence, and that violence can be in the form of everyday absences, everyday acts of oppression that go unrecognized, that are normalized. And even the kind of everyday relationships that are constantly being reiterated and asserted, which are replicating various kinds of oppressive fault lines. So, I shared this example to kind of highlight that it's kind of an everyday struggle and that shapes the way that I ask questions, in my research, or where the questions come from. That's the way that I try to configure space that there are you know. So, often the way that I am with, you know, in relation to any of these things is through a relationship of accompaniment. And part of that is also what my experiences have taught me - that I do not want to be the recipient of someone's—for lack of a better word—charity. But it's something that someone feels good about because you know they have this perception that we are helping this woman of colour from the Global South. And I did not want to replicate those kinds of relationships in the work that I do, whether it's in the classroom… I teach in a context where I have so many students who are first generation learners. And so, again I pay a lot of attention to the absences. I think about the hidden curriculum. I think about *what does it mean for them to have a meaningful experience in the classroom?* So, again, one of the things that I learned that I kind of came to in the course of the work that I do is even something as simple as structuring group work in my classes differently, knowing that so many of my students work, either work part-time or full-time, and it's very difficult for them to connect outside of classroom to do any kind of group work. Many of them have caregiving responsibilities. Many of them are older. So, I make sure that when there is group work, I have time in the class and that there's a lot of scaffolding I do so that happens. So, for me that is such an important principle of being a feminist that *how do you recognize the absences and how do you create spaces that are inclusive*? And not inclusive in the sense that we have kind of a structure already set and then we allow someone to come into that structure, that we open up a little bit of space, but that we reconfigure the way that we are. I often like to think of the table analogy that we talk so much about: who is at the table, who isn't? And I have a fundamental problem with that, because the table has been there for such a long time that the shape of the table, who sits where at the table, what are the parameters of how do you even participate at that table are already predetermined. So, the only change that is happening is that we bring someone else, but we expect them to engage in all of the mores, the social regulations that are you know that are decided. So, I constantly think about how do we get rid of the table altogether? And what would that look like in our smaller spaces, in our intimate spaces, but also, thinking about it on more of a societal stream.

DS: So, what you were just saying has been making me think about these kinds of institutionalized forms of feminism, like civilized forms of feminism that get transported around

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the world most successfully, and I'm wondering how in your work, which we know is decolonial, so, this is a two-part question: How do you reconcile decoloniality with these forms of feminisms or the forms of feminisms that you have taken up specifically, especially in the context of gender-based violence, when so much of what's transported globally in relation to both violence and feminism is this kind of institutionalized forms. So, then the second question and more connected question, would that be also, can you provide for us a definition of decolonial feminism?

UD: (laughs) Yes, let me begin with the first part of your question. Of course, as I mentioned, there is such a way in which there are discourses of feminism, of especially White Western feminism, which are getting a lot of pushback now as neoliberal feminism as colonial feminism. So, feminisms that do not accommodate the self-determination of different groups of women. Feminism that is not intersectional, feminism that is not anti-imperialist. So, that's something that I've been grappling with a lot. But in the context of the question that you asked about reconciling, I don't think there is any reconciling. Because the foundations of these epistemologies, these onto-epistemologies are so distinct. And many of the Western traditions of feminism are steeped in binaries, in hierarchies. So, for me, what is so fundamental to decolonial feminism is that it is constantly working against those kinds of binaries, whatever that binary might be. It is certainly in relation to gender, but also recognizing that gender does not exist in and of itself, which means that any other binaries, whether it's in terms of the mind-body, the centre-periphery, Global South-Global North, there are constantly these binaries that colonialism has established that we have internalized and are constantly replicating. So, for me, fundamentally, decolonial feminism is about contesting and breaking down those binaries. And really sort of living into a different way of being that is not controlled, dictated by those kinds of binaries. But I think there are so many instances where we see those tensions arising from these different onto-epistemological traditions, onto-epistemological and also political traditions. They have material structural implications. So, I think, historically we've seen those kinds of tensions arise, especially in the US in relation to US imperialism. We have seen how feminists had, especially White feminists, have taken a stand where they have supported war. For me, as a feminist, there is no circumstances where I can think that war is acceptable, that it is OK for a global imperialist power to go and attack another group. I mean it was not even that, that was kind of the smokescreen that we need to rescue women without recognizing or thinking about what the agency of the women are there, or how are they resisting and what does it mean to accompany them, as opposed to going and killing everyone there? And this also kind of goes back to abolition, to transformative justice, that there are there are so many ways in which collective punishment and retributive justice have been a part of Western feminist traditions, and also transplanted into many non-Western contexts as well. That is something that decolonial feminism tries to fight, because we're constantly thinking about, *what is the world that we are struggling for?* And that is not the world that we are struggling for. So, somehow the means of our struggle, cannot be so incongruous with the kind of worlds that we want to see. So, I think those are some of the tensions that come up. We are certainly seeing that right now in the ways in which Palestinian women or Palestinian women's

{00:22:41}

resistance, that is not something that Western feminism can accommodate, right? There are also ways in which the only way that Palestinian women and children can be brought into consideration as human beings that we should be grieving, is only if we are able to see them as disengaged politically, not political, people who are not raising their voices, only these very abject conditions of suffering. The idea that they can suffer and that they can also speak up and that they can still throw stones at Israeli Occupation Forces, that complexity cannot be accommodated within White Western feminism. So, I think there's a way in which the lines that are drawn are so immovable, and yet they're also very, very tacit and invisible, except to those who are at the receiving end of that. I sometimes think about that as almost like colouring within the lines. And the people who have drawn the lines know where the lines are, and you, as someone who's kind of navigating, negotiating this space, may often end up colouring outside the lines because, either you don't know where the lines are, or you don't care. But there are consequences for that. So, I think we are seeing so much of that happen right now. I think another really powerful example here is how we think about reproductive justice. That in this country, so much of reproductive justice is thought about in terms of access to abortion. We are not thinking about, *what does it mean for Black and Brown women here*, the ways in which they are hyper sexualized or the ways in which they have to contend with the fact that their children might be killed by the police in a very regular encounter. That reproductive justice is also about the right to have healthy children, to have access to healthcare, access to food, access to be able to make your own decisions, not have your bodies objectified, not having forced sterilizations. That those aren't at the forefront of conversations about reproductive justice or reproductive injustice. And something that Palestinian feminists are drawing a lot of attention to as reproductive genocide. How are we not able to see the conversations that we are having here and then seeing this kind of utter destruction that is happening of what this means, of mothers not being able to give birth under even the minimal sanitary conditions, where even if they give birth the dangers of starvation are so high. This absence of being able to reconcile that, that speaks to the incapacity to recognize how interconnected things are. That there is such a way in which there is this imperialist neoliberal capitalist bubble that even feminism here resides within. That there is this incapacity to feel the suffering outside of even if one cannot do anything about it. I think there is often sort of that lens of: *OK, so, you know what, what can we do?* And I understand that, and that's important. But sometimes the question is not, *what can we do?* but it is, *how can we accompany people who are in struggle, people who are in contexts of unspeakable suffering?* And that fundamentally can change your relationship to how you come to it. So, yeah. I'm sorry if I went in all kinds of directions, but I think this is the moment that we are in, where we are seeing all these things really exposing and laying bare some of the ways in which imperialism, colonialism, capitalism are so entrenched in the ways that feminism is understood and practiced here.

AN: Yeah, it's brilliant actually. It's been a very generous answer, and I kind of want to touch on psychology now, within that context. Well, you did speak about reproductive justice and how it is seen as a feminist issue, but it's also limited when we look at the Western idea or white feminism, and I think also, for example, of how it's connected the carceral system as well, and migrant

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women, when they come to the United States and what's done with their children and care, the idea of carrying in your body a killable child, essentially, or a die-able child. And so, then I'm curious, because psychology, not just feminism, but psychology is what it is. It is a Western construct. It does not mean that you can't change, but why, then, what attracted you to psychology and how has that evolved?

UD: Yes. So, that's a really interesting question and I have to take you back a little bit to my early years and a little bit of context about the place where I grew up. So, I grew up in this little town called Tura, which is in the Garo Hills. It's part of a very hilly region, mountainous region, Garo Hills in the northeastern borderlands of the Indian state. So, growing up, I was very conscious about the places where I grew up, which was essentially my home, as being considered remote, as being considered underdeveloped, uncivilized. There are also, a lot of indigenous people who are there, sort of these ideas that they're uncivilized, are *less than* other people. And that region was also seen kind of distinct from the rest of India, which was called Mainland India, and it's still called Mainland India and Northeast India. So, there was that kind of geopolitical setting, but it was also the material realities. I was very conscious of the fact that there was so much of even essential things that we did not have access to. So, just to give an example: To see a specialist, any kind of specialist, in a city or town (I mean, here it would be considered a city) of, I think we had, at the time, maybe about 60,000 people, but we had one OBGYN and one dentist, at the time I was growing up. And all that the dentist knew was to pull out teeth, and nothing else (laughs). So, I actually grew up never going to the dentist. So even to see a dentist who could do more than just pull out teeth, you would have to go to the next city, which was about, at the time, an overnight journey to go there. I mean, now the roads have improved and it's easier to go. But that's where the nearest airport was, and I grew up seeing, like… and especially now knowing that so many people died because they did not get critical care, because you needed to travel 8 hours in order to get critical care. So, the material struggles were very true. But I'm also saying this to highlight the context that there was no other kind of specialist care. So, we had one person who actually had a degree in psychiatry but was struggling with alcoholism and was barely functional himself. So, anything around mental health or mental health support was nonexistent. And the reason that I started thinking about this really early was the school that I attended. This was a school that I was in from kindergarten to my 10th grade. It was a small school in a residential area, so, we knew the people who lived nearby, it wasn't segregated from the neighborhood. But there was this young woman there who, at the time, everyone called crazy or mad. And every now and then, she would just run across the school campus. So, the way the school was, it wasn't fenced in or anything. So, sometimes people would walk through the campus to cut across, instead of going all around. And every now and then, this girl would run in and then her family members would come in and take her, [this] young woman. And the story there was that, I think at the time she was probably like 12 or 13, and she witnessed her older sister get murdered by her boyfriend. And we all knew that story. And for me, even at the time, there was something about it where I understood that all of her behaviors that were being called crazy or mad, they made sense to me.

{00:33:47}

I don't think I thought about it in terms of trauma at the time. But I would keep reflecting, when people would make fun of her and all the things that she would do, I would just keep thinking, *what must she feel like inside*? What is her interiority, having seen something like that, having witnessed something like that, what does it do to you, how do you even go back to being "normal" after something like this? That was something that I think I started thinking about so early, and the ways in which people were indifferent or insensitive were also very glaring to me. And over time, I think, as I was growing up there, I became very conscious of just how limited the possibilities for what and how one could be were. That things were so strict that you could either be this [or that]. So, you could be someone who is good at academics, and if you were serious about academics, then you couldn't be someone who would be politically active. And then of course the whole thing around anything having to do with gender and sexuality that were non-heteronormative were just again very caricatured. And I thought a lot about the people that I grew up with who would probably identify as nonbinary, now in this space, with this kind of language and discourse being available to us. There were a lot of those struggles that I saw: where was the space for young people to figure out who they were? And I experienced some of that myself, but to me there was such a gap. And that's how I got interested in psychology. And it was interesting, because I never studied psychology in school. I lived in that town until I completed high school there. And then most of us had to move out from there because there weren't good educational institutions that you could continue in higher ed. So, even though I hadn't studied psychology at all, somehow for me, in my mind, I had decided that that's what psychologists do. Something about, how do we create spaces where people can be in different ways. And some of that was also really brought home to me by the suicides that happened as I was growing up, and they would usually be young people, some people that I knew, others that I knew of. I mean, most of us knew each other. And that was also something that sat with me really heavily, because I kept thinking about how so much of our instinct is about survival, that we are always doing things that are geared towards survival. And how much must you be suffering if your instinct is not to survive? So, that's how I ended up becoming interested in psychology. Or at least, you know what I thought psychology was, the space where you can, very loosely speaking, help others. But it was more around, *how do we create spaces where people can come into being in different ways?* And also, I think a team that I associated with psychology, again like my own perception of psychology, was something very humanizing that, like these humanizing, accepting, spaces. So, that's how I got an undergraduate degree in psychology. And then I think during all of those times, I couldn't imagine doing anything other than clinical, but I think that's also how I thought, that clinical is where you do this kind of work. And then I went on to do my master's degree in India, again in clinical, and that was a really powerful experience for me, especially when I started doing clinical work there. As part of the master's program, we had to spend nine months in a hospital setting, in a mental health facility, getting experience in different departments with outpatient, one-on-one therapy, with psychiatrists, with psychologists, with rehabilitation work, with inpatient units or across a spectrum of things. And this was in Delhi, in the capital city of India. And it's when I started that work that it really hit hard for me, understanding the importance of context. And context in

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multiple ways: So, the setting where I was placed was supposed to be one of the best places in the city, in Delhi, for mental healthcare. It was a private facility. When they have research elements and when they commit to seeing a certain number of people for free, because of their economic circumstances, then they're able to get tax cuts. And so, most of them do this, at least on paper. But what was happening in this facility, which was supposed to be one of the best is, it was the interns who were being assigned clients from socioeconomic backgrounds who weren't able to pay. And, I mean, I knew right away that was unethical, given how little we knew at that point, there was no way that we would even be able to remotely provide the kind of support that they needed, but that basically our training was going to be happening at their expense, not at the expense of affluent, "paying" clients there. So, it started sort of that way that I began to see that even at that point of getting the care, they're getting no care or subpar care. And it's sometimes honestly harmful, given especially when there were students in my group who had no idea that they did not know anything. So, they were very much like, "oh, I'm here to do therapy", and it's like (laughs) … but yeah, so, there was that happening. And then I also, even in those interactions when I had to interact with folks who would come in, I began to see that someone that I would see would end up coming from a rural area and it would have taken them two hours one way to get to the place. And it meant taking different modes of transport, and then waiting in line, and all of that, it meant that when most of them would be daily wage earners, they would not get that day's salary, if they did not go to work. So, it meant that they would not get paid that day. And then to think that the person that they were getting care from was me, who was not trained at all. So, there was that piece, and then also recognizing that they would be going back to the same conditions that were actually causing and aggravating whatever it is that they were struggling with. So, that's when I really began to feel like there has to be a different way to understand this. And I began to encounter the limits of sort of a therapeutic context, or more of a conventional therapeutic context. And I think for me it was also kind of like my theory of change was shifting. It wasn't that I did not think that therapy was important, but I realized that that's not where I saw myself enacting change, that it felt that I needed to be doing work more at a community level, at a collective level, where we weren't disconnected from the structures that were causing the things that people were struggling with, and maybe there would be ways to intervene in some of those structural issues, rather than waiting for them to just come into the therapeutic space. So, that's kind of been my journey. That was also around the time that I was also doing my master's thesis at the time. I was working with young men who had been incarcerated for their alleged affiliation to armed insurgent groups in that region. So that was around the time that the ethnic conflict was on the rise, it was escalating. But I was particularly interested in really young men who are not leaders in the organization, but who are considered foot soldiers. So, they were really just carrying out the menial tasks that the leaders would ask them to. And they would be the ones who would be arrested. So, they were incarcerated at the time, and at the time, I was very interested in a psychoanalytic framework, in an existential framework. So, that's where I went into it. But as I started talking to them, and I had multiple sessions with them over time, so much of the psychological theories that I went with completely went down the drain. And then that's when it really hit me, and again, at the time, I wasn't thinking about theorizing from lived experiences or theorizing in the flesh. But recognizing in a

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very fundamental way that this is where life is happening, and this is the space from where we have to understand what is going on rather than bringing in all of these theoretical questions and sort of limiting ourselves to that. But really letting the lived experiences lead us. So there was that. But I think, at the same time, it also really sharpened my understanding of the ways in which different structures and systems were implicated. And to see how much of the suffering that I was seeing in the young men who were in the prison…, I mean, I had met someone as young as 17, and the state had changed his age, because otherwise he would be sent to juvenile detention, and there was no juvenile detention in that area. So, just to make life easier for themselves, they just increased his age so that he could be in the general prison. So, there was so much of that that came up, and I think that kind of began to shape my trajectory more in the direction of what I'm doing now, to be really working at these intersections of the of the, of the intimate, of the everyday, but also, of these very structural macro forces. And to me that is the psychology that I think is psychology. I mean, I think there are many psychologies, people come to it in different ways. But for me, and especially from the context that I'm from, where I have grown up, many of the ways in which psychology is institutionalized, is codified here is not going to work. You know that that's not going to make any sense at all. You know? So, for me, this is the psychology that makes sense, and I don't think I'm the only one doing that. I found a lot of resonance in liberation psychology that made a lot of sense to me when I encountered that. That yes, you know, this is it. We are trying to transform the conditions of being - that's fundamentally what the work of a psychologist is. You know that's what I think. So, that's how I kind of found my way. And when I came to the doctoral program here in the US, I have to confess I was very naive. I had no idea how the discipline of psychology was in the US. I kind of used my own experience of studying clinical psychology in India, which again was I think very unique because of the people under whom I studied. So, just to give you an example, one of my very first clinical psychology classes in my master's program, we started by reading Foucault. And we read so many existential theorists, and we read literature as a way to understand clinical phenomena. So, I had a very, very different socialization and introduction to what I thought was clinical psychology. I kind of came with the same ideas. But this was also the time when I mean, I didn't know anyone who was doing a PhD, here. This was before smartphones and easier access to Internet as we have now. So, it was a lot of my own searching, but I landed in a clinical community side program and in my mind, I thought that's the kind of work I wanted. Because I was still at the time interested in thinking about clinical conditions and thinking about, *how can we redefine, reimagine therapeutic alliance as therapeutic conditions, given all of these structural things that we are up against*. So, I come to the program, and it became very clear to me that this was not the clinical psychology that I thought, because it was almost entirely psychopathology. And it made no sense to me whatsoever. And even in those psychopathology courses, I would keep bringing up questions like, because so much of it they were thinking about. Oh, these are the diagnostic things, these are the insurance questions. And I was like, but, what about people with no insurance? And then I would be told*, oh that's a community psychology question* (laughs). So, it felt so bifurcating. It's almost like these two

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things couldn't come together, and very quickly people identified me as the community person. And I think initially I had a little bit of, I was like, *I have no idea what's happening here*. But then I think I kind of found my way that, I think those were also the points when it became less important for me to be thinking about, *am I clinical, am I community*? But to be thinking about, *what is it that I need to do*? So, I think, frankly, a lot of what I have done is done what I have needed to do, and then strategically given it a label, or leveraged disciplinary ideas or fields or identities, including being a psychologist or a community psychologist, sometimes I have positioned myself as a peace psychologist, as a critical social psychologist. Because to me, these things aren't very separate and they become more of a functional thing that, *what is it that I need to be, in terms of having an identity that can allow me to do the work that I need to do*. So, I think, in that sense, I'm not a very good person to be asking these questions about the identity of a psychologist because I think that has shifted so much over the years. I think, when I first started out, I was very committed, very tied to the idea of being a psychologist. But over time, especially sort of after learning about the terrible history of institutionalized psychology, of the APA, all of those, that the identity of psychologist was no longer a central one for me.

AN: Right.

UD: But it was more about, OK, you know who do I need to be to be able to do the work? And that's what I'll be. So, sorry, that was a very long-winded way of responding to your question.

AN: No, that was perfect, and I don't think there could not have been another way to answer that, to be honest about what it is that you do, and why you do the thing that you do. Before I pass it on to you (DS), perhaps my next question would be: You've talked a little bit about the trajectory. Perhaps at this point, when you start to realize that when you come to the United States, and what you're doing and what's being taught and what you want to do are not the same thing, how do you then navigate that? How do you, when you have shared that you wanted to concentrate on what you wanted to do and then figured out how to. But how do you actually do it? And, how did you do it and how do you speak to your students about doing that kind of work.

UD: Hmm. Yes. Yeah, that's a that's a really good question and I think there are different answers to that. I do that depending on the context. So, I'll start with, how do I speak to my students. So, I often teach an undergraduate course in Community Psychology. It's a survey course. We have students from not only psych majors, but we have students from across campus. So, there may be biology students, business students. So, for me, what's central to actually any course that I teach is about social justice. But that course there I use the discipline as a way of legitimizing what I'm teaching; I'm able to draw in the discipline and I present them the version of the discipline that I am drawn to, to a critical tradition, to a tradition that is antiracist, you know, that is feminist. So, that's what I bring in and that's how I define community psychology for them. And then I open up the space to say that my expectation out of students is not that everyone becomes a community psychologist, or everyone wants to pursue a degree in community psychology, but they take the basic principles and use those to interact with the world. That, for example, when

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they're reading a news article, they ask the kinds of questions that that we are constantly asking: whose voices are written in, and who is excluded from that? Who does that serve? So, really asking those kinds of questions, you know? So, it's kind of a two-sided thing, that on one hand I constantly draw in the discipline, and I found that especially as a woman of colour teaching those things, I have to engage in those kinds of legitimizing practices, because of course, when you have a woman of colour who looks like me, who speaks like me or who's talking about the issues that I am, that it can be very easy to just slot you into "these are just feelings and opinions". So, then that becomes very important. So, I do a lot of work, really emphasizing to the students that there is an incredible body of work that exists that I'm drawing from, and that is the disciplinary space. So, it becomes so important to establish that. But then, for example, when I'm teaching students in master's or doctoral programs, it is very much that the discipline is presented as another institution and sort of talking about the dangers of disciplinarity and to also talk about that you can be of the discipline, but you do not have to have everything being shaped by that. After all, the discipline is also an institution and, kind of like saying that if you're going to be good critical psychologists, then you have to question the very institutions that they are a part of. And that includes psychology that includes the things that we are reading, that we are being exposed to. But there it starts with a different kind of a critical framework where questioning the discipline begins day one, and sort of saying that, let's question everything that you know about psychology, that you know about disciplinarity from day one. There are different ways that I get at it. But I think the thing that has been perhaps most challenging and difficult, and in some ways having to kind of find my own way, is with research, with being able to not only do the work that I want to do, but write the work, present the work in the way that makes sense to me. And that's not been easy at all. Even going through grad school, a lot of times the expectations that the writing has to be done in a particular way. For instance, one of the things that I struggled with so much in grad school was just the general format of a paper or an article. That you begin with… there is a literature review, there is an issue, and you then come to the question… and my questions, my research questions were always rooted in my community and my experiences. So, I didn't know how to do that. So, there was a way that I would start writing about the context first, because that was so central, that the place where this was happening, those histories were so important. For me, the literature came after that. It wasn't that I decided to just pursue this question because I was interested in the literature. So, there was something about that linearity and the temporality that it assumed that was always at odds with the ways that I was making sense of knowledge and what that meant to me. So, that's been a lot of back and forth and a lot of pushbacks. You know I've had to push back a lot to say that this is the way that it has to be written. And I remember, one time that this really became so apparent to me was when I was writing something, I don't remember exactly what, but connected to my research, and I had given it to my advisor to read. And the feedback that he gave was very much about reconstructing it into a more conventional form. And I tried to do that. So, we went through multiple iterations, and then it got into a form that one would expect. And then he reads that, and then it struck him that this doesn't work. So, then it was kind of going back. And I think for me it was such a learning experience, that I need to also trust my instincts of how writing happens for me.

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So, there's been a lot of that, of sort of this constant pressures of trying to make things intelligible to other people on their terms; of being given, of being told, sometimes in words, sometimes in other ways, that the work that I was doing or the questions that I was asking were very specific because they had to do with a group of people in India. And, I mean, obviously, we talk about that a lot now, especially now given the kinds of questions of understanding justice that we have been grappling with. These question of what counts, as what is this local specific case study versus this general knowledge, you know, *even though the work being done here is also in a small group of people in a particular place*, you know? How does that somehow become more epistemologically valuable than something else? So, there's been a lot of that, and I think it's taken me a lot of struggle kind of wading my way through to *find my voice*. And I think there were times in grad school when it was easy to find my voice. But I think the hardest time that I've had is once I started my faculty position. And I started it right out of grad school. And the first three years as faculty, I had no mentoring whatsoever. And not in any shape or form. And I'm not just even talking about having one mentor who kind of sees you through, not even that, but even any kind of support to be thinking through what this is going to look like for me. So, that was very, very difficult and very challenging. And very difficult to locate my voice at the time. I was trying to figure out a new institution. I was trying to figure out, who am I as a teacher? And then, the kinds of advice that I was getting was feeling so violent.

So, one example I'll share: I think this was may be after my first year there, that this might have been the first personal committee meeting that happened, and then the personal committee chair came to speak with me. And they were like, "oh, it came up [that] you do this international research." So, again, which for them is international, it's not international for me. But yeah, "you do this research, and you know that it's very hard, it's time consuming, you can't go and spend time there". So, the suggestion from the committee was that, maybe you can just go collect some data from the International Students Office. And I still remember I had that conversation, and I went back to my office, and I just bawled my eyes out like, "what am I even doing here?" Like, it's my heart's work. It's why I'm here. I didn't end up in academia because I wanted to be a professor. But, you know, it was creating, co-creating that kind of knowledge, that kind of resistant and defiant knowledge about my communities, the people I am part of, you know. That was such a responsibility that I was carrying, and to not having seen that at all, or even…to me, it was also [that] they didn't even understand what I was doing, if they were telling me to just go collect, do some survey research on international students, as if the substantive questions that I was asking did not even matter. So, it was really hard to find my voice. And especially, I think it was also hard because obviously when I became a faculty, there were so many other responsibilities that I wasn't able to, you know… It was also hard to sustain the kinds of connection and relationships that I had when I was in grad school, where I would go back and spend the entire summer there, sometimes even during the winter. So, that became very hard. So, I really struggled, and it really took me a while to find my voice and I think a big part of that was also finding my people, finding community. And I think the way that happened was also finding community with other people who are also struggling, who are also

{1:04:13}

on the margins or even if they weren't in the same place as I was but having had that experience and not having forgotten that. So, I think once I began to find my people, find that community of people who saw me, that has been so central to find my voice and to give myself permission to speak in many ways. Because so much of what I would write, the response that I would get was also like a kind of incomprehensibility, that *what is this*? *It makes no sense at all*. And it was kind of both: that your ideas don't make sense, and you don't know how to write. So, it was both of those. So, it was only as I started connecting with folks who I would be so surprised that they had read anything that I had written and, I mean, I hadn't really written much at that point. But that was so important. That's when I talk about and when so much of my practice, especially now, is about being in collective, is about really building this space where we can embolden each other, where we see each other, that comes so much out of my own struggles and recognizing how important it is to have that in order to be emboldened to speak and write in the ways that you do. So, yeah, that's been incredibly difficult, but I do feel so grateful for the people that I met along the way. I don't even know that I would have continued to be in academia if it hadn't been to find that. It was almost like, being told that, you do have something to say, and I think before that, kind of being given the impression like, *who are you and, what are you even trying to do*? Like so, much of it was that combination of invisibility and hyper visibility. And I think it was only in having the community and in having people hear, being able to hear what I am saying that had mattered so much, and that that's also become such a central part of everything I do, whether it's my research in communities, the relationships that I have with my students, but just across the board.

AN: Thank you for that. I am glad you found that community. We [Des and I] have talked about how much your writing, the way you write, is one of the things that we have found extraordinary, because it's not the kind of dry [academic] papers that we often read. And so, we have seen that, and we have actually wondered how you've made that happen, because there is poetry and there is humanity in it. I think it's the poetry [of it that is beautiful]. And some of the stuff that I've been thinking about, and I think that I am hearing in your voice and your story, have been about epistemic gaslighting of women-of-colour academics. And it does sound that that's exactly what has been happening and one of the things that I was telling [Des] has been about when I start to read about women of colour who are academics who write about their experiences, the words "I felt crazy" comes up a lot. And I wonder if you've had that experience where it's like, what am I, feeling crazy?

UD: Mmhm, yes

AN: You have? And this is what community has helped you see, that you are NOT crazy?

UD: Yes.

AN: That's incredible. And have how have you dealt with that? Is that through community or did you search for community for that or did people just kind of come and carry you, or mix of that?

UD: Yes. So, it's happened in in different ways. There are some things that are so imprinted on

{1:08:34}

my mind that happened, because those moments felt so pivotal. I remember in 2015, our campus was hosting the Biennial Conference of the Society for Community Research and Action, the Community Psychology Division. And that was also the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the field. So, there was a plenary that was being set up around speaking about the field. I was on the organizing committee, so I was involved in different things. But at some point, I was invited to be part of that plenary. And it really… the words that I find best to describe it is that it was *icky*, is what I felt. Because I had sat through so many of those conversations, where people were talking about*, oh, we don't just want older white men*. But it was so categorical, like, *oh, there should be someone who's young. There should be someone who's not from the US*. So, it felt very tokenistic when those conversations were happening. And the recommendation or the idea of inviting me did not come from the organizing committee. It came from someone else who had been invited to be part of that panel and then they recommended that I should be asked to. But nevertheless, despite the way that I felt, I did say yes to it because it felt like an important opportunity. And it was nerve-racking to be doing something like that. And I think the initial expectation was that it would be about so much talking about the past, how the field has served... But I don't have that kind of relationship to the field. So, in the way that I work, it was very much a questioning of a lot of the traditions. And bringing in our feminist, global south, anti-imperialist questions to this. But as we were doing it, I still got this feedback about what is it that you were saying, and also, sort of made to feel like I was being ungrateful to a field that was inviting me to be on a plenary, and here I was critiquing the field. But the other two people who were on the panel were also coming from that kind of a place (of critiquing the field). So, it ended up being the entire plenary, rather than being focused on the past and contributions, it became so much about questioning what we are doing now and what does it mean to move forward, so that helped. I didn't know the other people on the plenary very well. But right now, both of them are my good friends, and I have a lot of respect for them. But as we were sitting on the dais before it began, one of the speakers, they just look at me, and they're like, *I wish you were a faculty on our campus*. And it just blew my mind. I think my first question to her was like or my first comment was I didn't even know you knew (of) my existence (laughs). But it was less important that that's what she said. But I think for me it was suddenly that I was seen and then we became really good friends. But it was that kind of space where I think it was that first moment of being seen, and then sort of really seeing that there was this genuine relationship that came out of it, which was not transactional. It wasn't just about that I was only talking to them because they were able to help me in some way. And it happened over time: There was a comfort that eventually came out of it. It took me some time to get over myself and to reach out when I needed support or if I had questions. And I remember, I think one time they had reached out to me to ask to just get my input on something on this was quite a few years ago and it took me. It was so difficult for me to respond because I couldn't even imagine why they would ask for my advice or my input. But I think slowly, that was also the reciprocal part of that relationship, and it comes back to that, that I wasn't a project for them, you know? That "Oh, let's uplift this woman of colour". But it was so much about that they recognized…that there was something very humanizing. It was a friendship. It was a relationship. Another example that I'll give was in

{1:13:45}

South Africa in 2016. They hosted the International Community Conference in Durban. And that again was a moment where I think before I went to that conference, I was so close to giving up on academia, and they invited me to be part of their closing plenary for that conference. And I was very surprised, because I did not know anyone there, I had no connections. So, I assumed that someone that I knew must have recommended [me], the way that things work in in academia. But I go there, and I mean, even before that, just as we were planning things and we had some e-mail exchanges, there was already something about that that felt different. But when I went there, I remember I went in, and I just wanted to go say hello to the two main organizers that I had been communicating with. So, I went to say hello to them, and it was the most natural thing in the world that we didn't shake hands, but we hugged, yeah. I know it was such a powerful moment of connection, and almost of knowing that *these are my people*. But that was really solidified over the course of the conference. And then, when we got talking, I asked them, so, who referred my name, who gave my name? And they were like, no one did, we read one of your papers. And it was, to me, mind blowing again, because I was working so much outside of the conventional lineages that we so take for granted that my first thought was, who would have talked to them about me? But then this was something they also brought up at the conference, saying that they were very conscious about not relying on these academic disciplinary lineages as they were figuring out speakers and those kinds of things. So, I think, really, sort of finding those people and spaces which were in so many ways not just ideologically, but I think even onto-epistemologically aligned. There are ways of being really sort of aligned with my ways of being. And, I mean, I've learned so much from them through our relationships. But, I think, perhaps the most important thing here has been that none of these relationships started with collaborations. They started as finding each other, as friendships and anything that we have written together came later. That was not the starting point, and I think that is very, very telling, even in the work that we have done. So, the work that I've done with Devin Atallah, for example. Our writing came much later. Before that, it was really just connecting with each other, getting to know each other's communities. We have met the community groups that we work with, that they have relationships with each other. So, all of those things. When we come together to write eventually, it's not just about a paper. It's really about making so much of our histories and our struggles visible. And we are able to do that really powerfully when we do it together. So, I think those things have been really important. That's been sort of my route to finding community, not through the more conventional academic route of beginning a research collaboration or some kind of a collaboration and having a friendship emerge out of that. But it's been the other way around.

AN: Maybe that is what transpires from you work! This is different.

UD: So really, going back to the question of the crazy-making, something that I've also realized is that some of these things we are able to laugh about. So, there have been times when I have had an encounter where I'm so angry and agitated, and then I talked to someone and rather than

{1:18:24}

kind of fueling that rage they will say something which undermines, really takes away the power of those who have engaged in that kind of whatever that has felt like a violation. And it's like, *oh,*

that is so petty and so inane, you know. So, I think being able to laugh about it and make fun of it also sometimes feels important. So, I think there are those different ways that it happens. And I think it's almost like there's a reciprocity around it that when you are part of that community and then when you're in spaces - because you know my everyday experience in my institution, in my department, is very, very isolating, very alienating, very violent in a lot of ways, very invisibilizing. So, that constantly happens, but often when I'm in those spaces, I know that this is not my community, these aren't the people that I need validation from. So, I think that has also been something really crucial and liberating over time. And it's not something that's just come about, because I think it's very hard to let go of kind of wanting some kind of validation from the people who are supposed to be your community, even if they aren't. Whether it's your department, the discipline, that kind of thing. But I think really letting go, to the extent possible, of the validation from the department, the institution, from the various kinds of professional organizations, not seeing that as the primary source of validation, I think that is the way that I deal with the stuff that I recognize. The crazy-making seems less crazy if that is what you want, but you know if, for example, my primary goal is to become full professor, then all of the crazy making are things that I have to engage with because that is what I want. But if that's not my primary goal, then I kind of take the power away from them. And I think that's something that I have cultivated over time to really remind myself. You all know how entrenched it is, how it's not just about telling yourselves that, oh, I don't care about this. You can tell yourself 1000 times, and then there is something within you that still cares. I'm not trying to minimize that struggle in any way, but I feel it has to be a conscious return to, *what am I doing? What matters to me?* And that when the things that matter happen, to really take that in. To see the shifts that happen in the classroom, for instance. And sometimes even students don't recognize that they may not be the ones who are telling you, *Oh, you know, we learned these things*, but [it is]in the ways, in the things that they have done, they have written, you know that shift has happened. Over time, I've really learned to lean into those and to really hold those very close to my heart. That is why I'm doing the work, and not because the university will give me a promotion, or they will give me an award. But it's a tussle. You constantly have to remind yourself what your compass is going to be. But yes, it's very hard to do that without community, even if it isn't a physical community right there.

DS: I think most of our questions are probably going to center around community! So, can you tell us a little bit more about your involvement with some of these feminist or activist organizations groups? I'm thinking the collectives and also, specifically, I think, right now it's really important, your work with Palestinian liberation organizations. If you could tell us about that.

UD: Yes. Again, you know a lot of my connections, my associations with these groups began really early through my mother. As I was growing up, she was involved in different women's groups there, and different collectives. And so, I would often accompany her in things, even things like, maybe like writing up materials or in whatever way I could support or like, go along

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with her. So, that consciousness was there really early. But over time, I've been involved with different collectives, a lot with collectives back in Northeast India. The impetus for being part of those collectives or figuring out ways to accompany those collectives has also been recognizing the, I think perhaps what you could think of as indivisibility of justice, and to me, when it comes down to feminist issues, I think where I see it the most is the way in which so many of these issues end up being seen as discrete category. There's intimate partner violence, there's domestic violence, there's incarceration, there's workplace harassment. So, all of these things as if they're separate. But when your starting point is the experiences of women, all of those things come together. You can't really separate any of those things. So, a lot of my work and my involvement has been around those lines that even if there are issues that might be central to a particular organization or a group that I've been a part of, my involvement has always been around, how do we bring all of these things together where we are not asking women to truncate some part of themselves to focus on something else. So, during the time that the conflict, the violence in my hometown had escalated a lot, the work that I was doing with groups of women that time - and it was not an organization, I think that part is also really important that sometimes the work happens in ways that are not organized in that conventional sense. But there was this informal network of women, both in the rural areas [and] in the urban areas, who were trying to figure out how to support each other. And that's what I became a part of. So, the work that I was doing at the time or sort of the way that I became involved was really listening to their stories and their experiences really, and sort of seeing my role as someone who had the access and the space to be able to sort of theorize from their lived experience. But it wasn't just about amplifying their lived experiences and then offering an analysis. It was really taking their analysis and offering their analysis as theory. So, to kind of get down to really a granular detail. You couldn't do thematic analysis there, because so much of what I was doing was actually paying attention to how they were making connections, what kinds of arguments they were making, and how they were sort of laying out the interconnectedness of these various things in their lives, how the state, the intimate family life, ethnic violence, how all of those things were coming together, in just relating what happens on a single day in their life. So, those were the kinds of things that I was uplifting. So, I was kind of seeing my role as someone who was making those connections more visible, rather than making those connections myself, you know, those connections were already being made. Every woman that I talked to had such a nuanced and critical analysis of all of the different systems in their lives and how they were connected. So, that's where I see a lot of my involvement. So, I was involved with them for a while, but I've also been involved with other groups. Not always as a central member, but again, in these different kinds of roles. So, I'm often called in or I'm often invited to engage in storytelling, and in ways of writing stories that are against the grain. And then this kind of goes back to what I was saying that for me, so much of feminism and feminist practice is about seeing things that might not be overtly visible, seeing, hearing things that people might not be noticing, seeing the absences. And I think, over time, through these relationships, that's something that people have also realized, that that's the way that I bring in my feminist lens. So, I'm often asked to write stories about the organization, about

{1:28:17}

what happened with the issues that are ongoing. So, in those roles, one of the groups that I've been involved with more recently in very you know we've, that I've been accompanying very closely is a collective called Amrapari, it means “we can”. This group was formed in 2020, during the pandemic. I already had a very strong relationship at the time with one of the feminist activists in that region. She had been working there for a very long time. And during the pandemic, the women that she was accompanying there who were from her own community, especially in the rural areas, were really struggling with lockdown. The lockdown was very strict and most of these women worked as daily wage earners on agricultural land or on construction sites. And all of these things were shut down. So, they kept calling her, again and again, just really with all of these distress calls that, *our children are going to starve, what are we going to do?* Her name is Manju Mullah. This was a way for her to even contain all of like she was so disturbed, so distressed. But she couldn't even physically step out because of the strict lock downs. So, she started [Kheta] embroidery. This is a very traditional form of embroidery that has passed down from mothers, grandmothers. Traditionally the way it was done was you would just take old sarees, old cotton sarees that had become really soft, that were no longer starched. And you would make layers and quilt those together. So, she started doing that with a piece of fabric that she got just as a way to kind of find some way to cope with what was happening. And then it occurred to her that there might be something in this. So, then once the lockdown was a little bit more relaxed, she went to the islands where the women were having a really difficult time. And then she started, she kind of brought them in. Some of them already knew part of this, but it required a little bit of organizing. So, they started making quilts, but it was very much like, right from the very beginning, they saw themselves as fighting patriarchy and poverty. And they really understood how the two were so interconnected. That was 2020. And now in 2024, they still do the embroideries. But beyond quilts, they make a lot of different things, and they have a weaving unit, now. They're weaving their own fabric. They have a tailoring unit. It started with eight women and at this point I think they have about 140 women in different capacities. And just accompanying them on this has been phenomenal. To see the journey and to have the opportunity to be involved in ways which were- and this wasn't a research collaboration. I knew Manju. I had met with her in the context of accompanying her struggles, as they were fighting against the state violence. They were being disenfranchised; they were facing detention. So, that's how I connected with them. But again, this is a little bit of a back story, but I think it's important. So, the first time that I went there, I have been talking to them for a while. The first time that I met them in person, I got to know Manju through her partner, Abdul Kalam. So, I had been talking to him. He is a community organizer there, and we had been talking about what was going on in the community. And just before I visited, there was an arrest warrant put out against him and this was against him and several other poets there who were being criminalized for their poetry, for writing about the state violence and the persecution that their communities were facing. So, until they got a bail warrant, he had to be in hiding. So, he was the only person that I really knew, that I had been talking to. But he wasn't there when I went. But, he had set things up so that I could go and I could talk to people. So, Manju and a few others were leading a gender

{1:33:25}

justice camp in the rural areas. This was like a weeklong camp with women from the rural areas, most of whom didn't even have functional literacy. But it was beautiful. And then I was invited to go there and to be a part of it. This was before I had even met them or really known much about them. As soon as I met her (Manju), her light, and her energy was just so obvious to me, in a very unassuming way. I knew that this is the person who is holding all of this together. And just seeing how people felt towards her. So, it felt like a very natural connection that I had. And again, sort of the connections to the women that I made. So, those relationships had started and then, of course, we had known each other for a while before the pandemic happened. And I think it was also not coincidental that I had visited right before the pandemic. So, I came back and a week after that, everything went under lockdown. But I think that that we had been together in community had been important. So, when this started, it was very much like I came back, we had so many different plans of the work that we were going to do together, and then the pandemic happened and everything became about, *how do we respond to this moment, with the struggles that people were having?* And that's when she kind of started with the organization. And so, yeah, so, it's just been really beautiful to see that. But I think for me, what's also been such an important part of my journey with them is understanding [and] seeing what everyday resistance looks like and the beauty of it. I'll share this example because I mean for me it encapsulates everything just so amazing and beautiful about their work. So, this was I think when was this? This was maybe at the end of 2022, I think. Yes, I had gone there, and I met a lot of the women who were part of that collective, the rural women and I think something that is so fundamental about their way of being is mutual care. I was always so cared [for] and well fed, and this was by women that I had never even met. That anywhere, any space that I went, the first thing would be that I would be fed there. And I remember, one of the villages that we went to, the woman whose house we went to, I think she was eight months pregnant at the time, so, she had very limited mobility. But had that kind of presence, where even though it was her kitchen, there were other women who had come in and who were cooking. We ate together, and this was one of my first meetings with them, and then we were going to have a circle. So, we went, and this was in a little island. The area where we had open space was next to the river, so we went in there. They laid out a tarp and we were all sitting in a circle. And I was trying to ask them about what it meant to be part of that collective. And I really wanted to kind of know what it meant for them as women and in some ways as themselves and not just in terms of their caregiving responsibilities. And I realized that I did not know how to ask the question because as I was asking different things, I remember one of the women responded and said, *but how am I supposed to think about myself and not about others?* And she was like, *my mother is very sick, I take care of her so. So, I can't think of a circumstance where I think of myself and not of my mother*. And then someone else stepped in. So, I realized, I don't think I know how to ask that question, you know? So, I let it be. And we were speaking and as the women got more and more emboldened and they were sharing more of their stories, then suddenly, one woman says, as she was talking about the impact of this collective, she says that, *now that I make some money, I can actually buy a good bra*. And she was like, *you know earlier the bras that I would buy would be for ₹50. And on washing, the straps would become so loose and it would be really annoying,*

{1:38:20}

because it would slip out, but now I can buy a bra for ₹100, and those straps are tight. And there were several other women who were like, *oh, yeah, we do that too*. And, I got that, I mean, as a woman, I immediately got what she was saying. But to me, that was what I wanted to know, but I just didn't know how to ask the question. What did it mean to have this sense of independence? To be part of this kind of a women's Collective? But to me that also highlighted, again, why stories and relationships are so important. I don't think there was any way to get to that with asking questions. It had to be as part of that circle, it had to be as part of sharing stories and experiences. But yeah, so that's been such an important part of really learning and growing along with the women in the collective. And I think all of us are learning and growing in different ways. For me, I think it's also a constant reminder that feminism is not something that is a theory, that is always predetermined, that is always a given. But that it's in the making of these kinds of relational practices, and forms of resistance that women come to, even if that is not visible to anyone. So, to me, that has also been such an important part of my learning. That it's to constantly be able to see the resistance beside the oppression. And I think that's also what decolonial feminism is for me. So, those are some of the groups that I've been involved with. In terms of Palestine, for me, I have just learned so much from Palestinian feminists. And I think, part of it is because they bring so many of the fault lines that our societies are made-up of. But also fault lines that some of us can ignore more than others. I think being a Palestinian feminist means you cannot ignore any fault line, you always have to have all of those fault lines in your consciousness and to be working against those. So, for me, that's something that is so powerful. So, I really see myself as someone who is indebted to them, who is learning from them, and I tried to take my lead from their various calls to action. So, for instance you know something that I also hear them say is that feminism is not just about women and children. When you have basically all men who are criminalized – we are not just talking about men. We are talking about, 11-year-old boys who are criminalized. So, to be contesting even the ideas of... you know, to be thinking about women and children as civilians and, you know all men that it's OK to criminalize. So, you know, women and children do not exist outside of their relationships to the broader community. So, I think, bringing up those kinds of questions, but also to see resistance, all of the different ways that women resist. And I think this was also so visible to me when I visited there, and when I met some of the women in the families who were resisting demolition, that it was… Yeah, I think it's really from Palestinian women and Palestinian feminists that I have learned in a very real way what they mean when they say *to exist is to resist*. I don't think I really understood that viscerally, and in the very real way where it becomes a way that shapes my actions the way that it shapes pretty much everything I do and that has come from them. To really understand the essence of that. So, I think, I mean, it is incredible the ways that they are showing up, and I really hope that this moment means something, you know, for the rest of us who see ourselves as feminists, to take our lead from them, and to both in terms of the fierceness, but also how they refused to let go of their humanity in the face of this kind of dehumanizing violence. Yeah. So that's something that I've been sitting with a lot in these times.

DS: Yeah, when you first came in, we started talking about the conference, you brought attention to the reality that it's very easy, while here at the conference, to focus on the other things

{1:43:50}

happening within our community, within psychology's community, and to easily let go of an image and connection to the oppression of Palestinian women, or the oppression of women in other places in the world. And so, I'm curious what you see as the future of this feminist psychology, being in this discipline; how do we move forward from here, holding both of those things: the accomplishments of our discipline and the community that we're building alongside the greater responsibilities and roles that we play as people who identify as feminist psychologists committed to social change.

UD: Yes. I think more and more I've been really thinking about, what Angela Davis says, that "freedom is a constant struggle". I think, especially in the last several years, that reality has been brought into such a sharp focus that we cannot take any of our freedoms or any of our liberation as [a] given, that there's always a propensity for harm, that there's always propensity for that to be taken away. So, really to me, I think an integral part of the future is centering the struggles, you know, to kind of let go or to disabuse ourselves of the idea that somehow we struggle and get to something. But that that is always constant, because the moment we get complacent, we can become complicit in preserving and maintaining structures of oppression in different ways. So, I think that's sort of both recognizing the indeterminate struggle, but also, recognizing that the propensity of harm exists everywhere. It doesn't matter how we situate ourselves, what our values are, what our ideologies are, what we are committed to, but there is always a propensity for harm. And I think acknowledging that is important because then it means that we can also engage in the work of repair when needed, or to not be blindsided when something happens to shatter that, or to only respond in the defensive. So, for me, I see a lot of hope in the current generation. Every generation has to figure out what their struggles are, and what I'm seeing right now, especially with students, I think that has been so very powerful. The student movements, certainly the Gaza solidarity encampments, but also the different ways that students have been rising over the last several years on various kinds of issues. That, to me, is incredibly powerful, because I think struggles, whether you get precisely the thing that you're struggling for, whether you get that or not, being in struggle is a shift in consciousness. And when I think about the kind of world that we will see, where all of the young people who are in active struggle now, in places when they're at universities, at institutions, so, if you're thinking about academia: when they are in different places in the Academy or even beyond the Academy, for me, that's where I see a lot of hope. That this moment that they're a part of and the ways that they have been pushing back against these very, very entrenched structures of power, that has to shift their consciousness, and we are going to see a shift in praxis in the way of relating. And so, for me, I see a lot of hope. think for me, one of my most important roles is that of an educator. But I also see my role of as an educator is very much one of accompaniment. And I think that means seeing the light in people and finding a way for that, to create spaces and to create opportunities for that light to really shine through. Rather than sort of trying to create people who are like me, or try to push people into the direction of exactly what I have done. But it's really opening up those spaces. So, that's where I see a lot of things coming together. But I think really right now, I understand that so much of what we do, we are part of different legacies of struggle, and we are building on that. So, there is nothing that is ahistorical, that we are never just starting afresh. There is always

{1:49:12}

things that we are carrying with us. So, I think it's part of kind of recognizing that, that we are bringing, carrying these different legacies. But also, really knowing that every generation brings something of its own which becomes part of that legacy. So, I am really you know despite feeling so dismal about so many things, and it is hard not to, especially when you see just the kind of exercise of power that we are seeing and just asking, what is even going to stop the killing of people, stop the bombing, knowing that there's no going back after a genocide. But, even for now, can we just stop? But even in the face of that, when I see young people across the globe coming together in that way, I think about the world where they're going to be in the places that where we are right now. And I have hope for that future.

DS: So, what advice would you give to those young people, the feminists that are entering into these spaces now?

UD: Hmm. I would say, “be unapologetic” and “colour outside the lines” and maybe even, “erase the lines when you can”... Yeah, I think the most important thing is, especially for, I'm thinking about women of colour, women and nonbinary people, who are carrying so much with them, both what they experience on a daily basis but also the histories and legacies of trauma and struggle that they carry, I think it is so, important to not have to be apologetic about that, or to not have to hide that away, to be who you are. I'm not sure that I'm in any place to give advice to anyone (laughs) because, I mean, I'm learning so much from young people in this moment right now. But I think when I look back on my own experiences, I think what I can say is that it can be really, really, really liberating to find your voice, to find your emboldened voice, not a truncated voice, and that this journey is never linear. That sometimes you find your voice and then you can lose it, and then you have to re-find it. But to be unapologetic about that voice.

DS: Powerful… (to AN) Do you have any other questions?

AN: No. (turning to UD) I mean, we could talk to you forever.

(they all laugh)

DS: Then is there anything that we haven't mentioned, anything that you feel is important that you want to pass on, anything else you want to add to this.

UD: I mean not right now, but I'm sure I'll be reflecting on this if anything comes up, I can always share with you, but yeah.

DS: Okay. Thank you so, much for the generosity of your responses and your time and just, sharing all of your stories, I really appreciated all of the stories you shared with us.

UD: Thank you. I'm sure I went off in a lot of different directions and I don't know if the connections were always clear but yeah. So.

DS: They were very clear

{1:53:09}

AN: No, no, it's good because I think it does fit with everything that you're doing right now, that you've shared, that you've expanded on what things mean. Not just what happened, but how it got shaped and the relationship that were part of your shaping as well. And so, I think that was necessary. I agree with Desiree: I find that was generous, that you didn't try to truncate it to just be like "let's get this over with", but that you shared so much of your experience, I think is beautiful.

UD: Thank you. Yeah, I mean, I know that a lot of your questions were around being a psychologist, and I understand that's what this archive is about. But I think, in this moment especially right now, it is so difficult to respond to these questions as a psychologist.

DS: So, it's important to have voices, then, that are not responding to it in that way. We have been reflecting a lot on the archive and the need for different types of stories and different ways of articulating experience. And so, if that means veering away from psychology and not attending to it in that way, then that's also important. That's still a voice within psychology, and beyond, that is very necessary and something that we've been talking about really needing, so thank you.

UD: Yeah. I mean, I think so much of the work that I do, especially right now, it's been in psychology, but it's also always in opposition to the project of psychology in some sense. So, that's always there. But I think, like I was saying before that, like so many other things, Psychology is also an institution. And an institution that I have a very conflicted relationship to and that hasn't always served me. That a lot of things that I have done have been despite the institutions, rather than because of it. And I think that comes through in my responses, especially in this moment.

DS: Yes. Thank you. Thank you. Oh, it was really exciting to hear about the embroidery and the weaving. It made me feel very emotional. So, I apologize

UD: Oh, no, no, not at all.

DS: There's nothing that I love more than women coming together and doing embroidery, weaving. We just interviewed Puleng Segalo yesterday, and reflecting on her work with women doing embroidery, and the ways in which that offers a different kind of modality, or like halfway to be able to articulate experience, one that is not just like victimhood but is a story of resistance, a story of creation and weaving together. If you have that experience, we've been talking about metaphors of weaving, and whatnot and what it's actually like to hold thread in your hand, and to make mistakes or knots, what that feels like with the physical experience and that it really lends a different dimension to this type of work, the articulation of women's stories. So, I love hearing it.

UD: I'm really happy to hear that. Thank you. Thank you both this was…Yeah, as you can imagine, there's been so much going on. It was only this morning that I looked at the questions. I mean, I saw it, but, you know, I was also doing other things. But I think it was, yeah, so I hadn't thought through what I would respond. So, it was very much in the moment. But I think that was

{1:57:08}

also a testament to the two of you, and how you have set up the space and the ways that you were engaging and asking questions. And I think that's always so important. It's not just about the questions, but it's also who is asking and how they're doing it. So, I know that it wasn't just me, thinking about the questions and responding, but it was responding to your presence as well. So, just really appreciate that.

DS: Thank you. Can we take a photo with you?

UD: Yes, yes, of course. I love that.

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