

Transcripts of Scholarship and Activism Clips

Relationship between Scholarship and Activism
3 clips (Andrea Smith, Cathy Cohen and Ai Xiaoming)

ANDREA SMITH

00:10:33—00:12:38

Andrea: Well, yeah. The big thing that happened was, when I was just doing activism, I saw going back to academia as a vacation. I didn't necessarily see how you could do both.

Maria: Um-hum.

Andrea: And I thought I wouldn't be there very long. And, but my vacation lasted for about a week, and so I found that I was continuing the same activism I was doing before I went to the academy. But I actually found that the academy was actually a very easy place to do activism, because one, there was a lot more resources...

Maria: Um-hum.

Andrea: ...financial resources and other forms of support. And also I found it was helpful. It gives you a space to critically think about your activism, whereas when I was just doing activism, I was running from rally to rally, organizing this and that, and I didn't ever have the critical space to think, does this work? You know, I didn't...I don't think I even read a book for six years. So I found the academy was kind of helpful in giving...forcing you to have a little space to critically think about activism and what is the most effective strategies for ending world oppression.

Maria: Well, that's really interesting, because if there's one thing that I hear from graduate students...

Andrea: Um-hum.

Maria: ...complain, who, graduate students who fancy themselves as social activists, it's, it's that they feel that the two, the sort of academic world or the scholarly realm and the world of the community and their community activism are irreconcilable...

Andrea: Um-hum.

Maria: ...in some cases, and they...they have a lot of trouble balancing in their minds...

Andrea: Um-hum.

Maria: ...you know, they can't understand how one would balance that. And it seems like what you're saying is in fact the exact opposite.

Andrea: Um-hum. I think if you just don't stop being an activist, then you don't have any existential angst problems.

Maria: Yeah.

Andrea: So I think it's more people drop it and they're wondering, what did my community think again? So then you feel this divide, but if you don't stop doing it, then there really isn't a problem, because all your act—your scholarship is very much informed by what activists say. And there's no shortage of scholarship that's needed by activists.

Maria: Um-hum.

Andrea: It's like, you need to give us the analysis on prison industrial complex. Hence, your term paper is on the prison industrial complex. Or we need to see more perspectives on boarding schools or whatever, so I never feel divided at all, because it's very much informed by what...what activists say they need.

CATHY COHEN

00:42:54—00:46:52

Liz: But you were telling me at lunch that one of the missions of the institute that you're directing now is to make those kind of connections outside of the University. I wonder if you could talk about that a little bit.

Cathy: Sure. Sure. I have the privilege of directing the Center for the Study of Race, Politics and Culture at the University of Chicago. And there are many goals of the center. One is about kind of producing, you know, important intellectual work from largely a comparative race framework that understands the intersection of race with other identities and ideologies around gender and sexuality and class. We're also quite interested at the Center in supporting the work of both undergraduates and graduate students by engaging in the curriculum and helping to redefine the curriculum. But the thing I think that the Center is most engaged -- oh, I'm using engaged -- most committed to that I'm proud of, is this idea of producing engaged scholarship. And the idea is that we want to produce scholarship that holds to the rigor of the academy, of course. But that we also want to produce scholarship that is relevant and applicable and accessible to folks who may not be located in the academy. We want to produce scholarship that will help people transform their own lives, with the recognition that people are already doing, you know, really important work outside the academy. So it's not like they're waiting on us to tell them the truth. It's really kind of how to do you work in a principled way in partnership with institutions, with neighborhoods, with communities that aren't a part of the university. And how do you do that, when oftentimes, those neighborhoods and communities are very suspicious to say the least, of what happens within the university. Universities where they generally don't feel like they can, you know...they want to send their kids, universities where they don't feel they can walk on campus without the police harassing them. Universities that have engaged in urban development and kind of wiped out neighborhoods. And so it's...the challenge I think for us is to kind of think of this as a long-term project, and the idea isn't when we talk about engaged scholarship to go out and study a community and write a book, and then maybe come back and present the book at the library one Saturday. But how do you really build principled relationships and partnerships where there's going to be some negotiation, where you have to figure out ways to share power, where there has to be the acknowledgement that we come with more resources, but they may come with more knowledge about neighborhoods and communities. And it really is not easy work. You know, I think it's one thing to say that's what you want to do. And I think unfortunately far too many research institutes don't even say that. Or if they say that, what they mean is we'll open up our seminar room if some community group wants to come to campus and have a meeting. But we're really trying to figure out how do you promote this type of scholarship? How do you promote that type of scholarship also in institutions where the incentive structure is not to go outside the university, right? So if you're a junior faculty member trying to get tenure, and we're suggesting you go outside and build long-term relationships and your tenure clock is running, what are the choices that you're going to make? And by the time that you get tenure, you usually already have a research agenda, so now we're suggesting that you change your research agenda or you open it up a bit. It becomes very difficult. So even to do something like engaged scholarship through the Center, it means that the Center has to be engaged in a political process within the university to try to change some of the incentive structures there.

AI XIAOMING

00:37:15—00:41:50

Wang: Now you are continuously involved in different activities. According to the traditional views, activism is not what university professors should be involved in. How do you regard your identity as a professor who is also involved in social activism? Also in what way are you able to integrate the two roles?

Ai: Actually, yesterday I was talking about this same matter with Huang Lin. Nowadays there are some people who use the term “public intellectuals.” Could it be that there are “private intellectuals?” I think that an intellectual is an intellectual; you may say someone is an intellectual or not, but I do not understand why you want to make a distinction and use the term “public intellectuals.” If there should be “public intellectuals,” then there must also be intellectuals who are “not public.” I really do not understand this. What does it matter what intellectuals are called? (Laughs.) Some people say that intellectuals should not be involved in social activism, but if you look back at history, modern history, the so-called intellectuals have also done many bad things, like the mass criticisms, etc. Isn’t this a kind of activism? Isn’t constructing ideology a kind of activism? However when you look at this from a certain point of view, our style of activism is different from the kind used in the past. I think women’s studies cannot be separated from social practice since women’s issues and social activism are really closely linked. If I teach anti-sexual violence ideas, I cannot maintain silence about sexual violence in society. If you see how unfairly cases of sexual violence are handled in society, you would have no way to only teach theory in a classroom. How would you teach? You teach the students these ideas but the students may run into frustrating situations in society. I believe that Women’s Studies and feminist academics have a goal. One important goal is to transform the society. Your scholarship should aim to transform society. Of course this transformation is also a cultural transformation that is enabled by passing on these ideas. Why do people discriminate against others? It is because he first has an understanding of another person. If he thinks that the other person is inferior, he can discriminate against this person. Then we maintain this discriminative understanding by raising it to a higher level through public policy and the law. This can then turn into an institution. This institution can systematically deprive you of your rights so that you are silenced. If I want to change this system, I must start to do this by changing how people think. If you want to change people’s ideas then you must be able to analyze the ideas clearly. I have the ability to explain them very clearly. Many people do not have the opportunity for education, or are deprived of the opportunity for education. They do not have the means to speak out but we do. You must speak out and have your voice heard regarding public affairs. For instance, last year I continuously spoke out about the Huang Jing case. Also, last year in the Sichuan¹ personnel department there appeared the call not to “assign female secretaries to male leaders.” I wrote three articles in a week. I feel that I must explain my reasoning clearly and thoroughly. I have to explain myself really well. Every time that I write an article I have to wait a period of time before I start. Although I am extremely angry, sometimes I have to wait until I feel that I have accumulated enough energy, like a volcano before it erupts. This finally forces me to write. If you want to write well you have to be able to use your energy and to be unusually focused. Only then can you write a forceful, powerful article. In the past I did not have this kind of strength. In the past for instance, I wrote academic articles. Or I wrote an analysis of an artistic work. Sometimes when I wrote I felt that writing put me in a relaxed state; when I wrote I was rather happy because I was able to express my own ideas. Some of the ideas you could use

¹ Sichuan Province is in southwestern China.

your imagination to express. But when you are looking at some idea critically, especially if this idea has a kind of legal support or a kind of institutional support, you must challenge it. When you want to challenge it you must adopt a kind of extremely tenacious attitude. I don't easily make myself enter this kind of mindset, since doing so is a very stressful process. Moreover you are like a train, because once a train sets out, it has to reach its destination. Once I start writing I have to continue to write until I am finished. That is why I have to wait for a period of time before I start writing. Once I get in this state of mind, I often do not eat and do not drink until I am finished. In addition I have to read what I have written over and over and check each and every word that I have written. But usually articles written in such conditions are powerful. Therefore, through this process of writing, I have realized that words, and discourses, are one kind of weapon.

Linkages across movements within countries: India and Poland

2 clips (Neera Desai and Barbara Labuda)

NEERA DESAI

00:39:30—00:44:11

C.S.Lakshmi: Neeraben, you spoke about your thesis. You also spoke about S.N.D.T. University, Now since we are on this issue, I would like to know whether the women's movement in India was a movement that was parallel to the national movement?

Neera: I would say, yes and no, because the main organisation which spearheaded women's issues was All-India Women's Conference, which was established in 1927. Now, it was very paradoxical that [it was] initiated by the colonial administrator in the sense that he said, "Why don't you ask for education? Women should ask for more education for women," and that's how the organisation started. It was blessed by the Maharanis² and upper-caste Hindu³ women at that time – most of them were Hindu – but slowly it passed into the hands of women who were very actively participating in the freedom movement. And so the organisation which was started with saying that we will have nothing to do with politics, slowly got from education to social legislation, to political reforms and to Hindu Code Bill⁴, which itself was a political issue and which became (remains) till today a political issue. So that way, the women's movement was a part of the nationalist struggle. Those women who were active in both the organisations – Indian National Congress, or even CPI Communist Party of India – they were there and in All India Women's Conference, they were more or less the same. And so that kind of interchange and inter-exchange between nationalism and the gender issues was going on. And there were occasions, definitely, where the political leaders, stalwarts like Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru⁵, were saying that right now the gender question is not important but today, the more important item on the agenda is freedom for the country. And, it was here that some of the women had to, like Amrit Kaur⁶, like Kamaladevi had to say that, "No, for us, these are the important issues also." And they were somehow or the other trying to build up the bridge and trying to, I think, inadvertently, influence the political leaders to willy-nilly take up the gender issue, which was very much highlighted and which had a very, according to me, a very important role when the National Planning Commission was appointed in the '40s. Jawaharlal Nehru was the President and K.T. Shah⁷ was one of the important personnel. They had a separate section of National Commission on Women's Role in Planned Economy, which was the first official statement which was being prepared where women's issues – not merely legal, social, educational, but economic issues and her economic empowerment – were also on agenda. So, to that extent I would say that at times they were running parallelly, at times they were crossing with each other, at times they were supporting each other, so all these cross currents were going on.

² A Maharani is an Indian princess or elite Indian woman.

³ Polytheistic, codified religious and philosophical system, India's largest religious group.

⁴ While a common criminal code exists for every Indian citizen, areas of marriage, inheritance, divorce etc. are governed by separate personal laws for Muslims, Christians, and Hindus, which are based on the distinct religious tenets and customs of each group. The Hindu Code Bill attempted to codify the various Hindu civil laws under a single nomenclature. It was passed in 1956 after much opposition.

⁵ The first Prime Minister of independent India.

⁶ The first woman to hold a post in the cabinet as Minister in 1947. She was born into the royal family of Kapurtala. She took part in Salt Satyagraha and the Quit India Movement and also became an active social worker. Her major contribution as Minister of Health was the setting up of All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi.

⁷ A socialist economist.

BARBARA LABUDA

00:45:30--00:51:16

BL. ... In Polish Solidarity, our Solidarity, there were a lot of women who were active; half of this anti- totalitarian movement, of these ten million, were women. I mean statistically, and it's all researched and analyzed, there were regular membership lists, dues, lists of those who paid dues... In the leadership, on the other hand, there usually were no women, because, as it turns out, this movement was, in this aspect, a mirror image of social norms... it was the same. It was both that women didn't want to run, and I remember trying to talk them into it, and that they weren't usually elected, anyway. There were very few of them. For example, among the nineteen members, if I'm not mistaken, of the National Presidium, that is the national leadership of Solidarity, there was one woman. And that's what it was like in the majority of regions and majority of structures. On the other hand, women very willingly took charge of all the tasks that were very useful but of little prestige, such as office work, archives, press distribution, collecting dues, accounting etc. etc. But everything that was called a political politics, so to speak, in French *politic politisiua* [sic.], was done by men; strategy, action goals, struggle against communism, against the police, and so on, it was all males. And it remained the case for a very long time after that, has been carried on until today, actually. But yes, of course, I was deeply involved with the Round Table. Of course, at the Round Table, it was the same thing; among sixty people, there was one woman. From the Solidarity's side, that is, there was one. A single one.

SW. Who was she?

BL. It was Grazyna Staniszevska,⁸ a wonderful activist from Solidarity in Bielsko-Biala.⁹ But none of us who played a really important role then in the underground and took part in it... only our male colleagues... who sometimes... many of them hadn't really played such an important role, but they were all elected, co-opted, invited while we weren't. I mean myself and my female colleagues, who, I believe, played a great, incredibly important role; we did a lot for our country and its people. But I had a job all this time. At the Round Table, I was simply producing a bulletin, which we published every day, a bulletin informing the public about what was going on then in Warsaw, about all these incredibly difficult, important, great negotiations, which brought... which simply changed the system. Through negotiations, through evolution, evolution and not through violence, not through shooting people, killing, tortures and prisons, we were changing our country, so I was very much interested in it. Later, of course, there were free elections, and I ran for the Sejm.¹⁰ Most of my female colleagues didn't even want to run, so there were terribly few of us, but there were few of us nevertheless. Later, I became a representative to the Sejm, and when I got to the Sejm, I was interested in issues related to

⁸ **Staniszevska, Grazyna:** In 1989, she was a leader of the NSZZ Solidarity People's University of the Podbeskidzie region, and after she was released from the internment camp, worked as an instructor in a community center. Since 1984, she worked in the Science, Technology, and Economy Information Center "Redor" in Bielsko-Biala. In the 1980's, she was part of the Solidarity leadership, first officially and then underground, in the Podbeskidzie region. She was interned (1981-1982) and arrested (1983). Since 1988, she was active in the national leadership for the underground Solidarity. After participating in the Round Table negotiations, she was elected to the Sejm (Parliament) from the Solidarity Citizens' Committee ballot. In 1990-1991, she was a member of the Democratic Union, and since 1992 she has been a member of the Freedom Union; she is a member of the party's National Council.

⁹ A city in southwestern Poland.

¹⁰ **Sejm:** The lower house of the bicameral National Assembly (the Senate is the upper house). The Sejm is the more powerful of the two chambers. The Sejm has the constitutional responsibility of initiating and enacting laws as well as overseeing state administration.

changes, in changing all of this, dissolving the totalitarian institutions, changing the law, and also changing the norms, the social norms, which... So I was interested in everything that's related to these issues, so the issue of abortion became something like a fifth... third... fourth priority, but later it blew up suddenly, so that I had to react somehow.

SW. Are you already talking about the Movement for the Referendum?¹¹

BL. No, I'm talking about the proposal to abolish the liberal abortion law, since it was before the Movement for the Referendum emerged. So, first there was a proposal filed by the right-wing politicians from Solidarity, that is from my side, the right-wing politicians who decided to abolish a liberal law that existed during the times of the Polish People's Republic and to introduce a very restrictive one in its place. It introduced jail sentences for both the women who would undergo an abortion and for doctors and for all others involved in conducting the procedure. And there was a really big splash around this issue. I wasn't that passionately involved in it at that time, because I was busy with foreign affairs. I was in the Foreign Affairs Committee, and I was also busy with the media. I proposed, for example, and it was my first step as a Sejm member, the idea to abolish censorship in Poland. And it was practically a legislative initiative, a historic one, about the institution of censorship, since there had been regular censorship in Poland, and I proposed... And this is what interested me, but suddenly abortion popped up into my field of vision. And because I had these feminist views about freedom and equality, it seemed obvious to me that I should speak about the matter, that I would defend my point of view, and that I would defend the free and liberal law. And suddenly it became clear that gradually I was being perceived as some leader of this movement, as the main carrier of the idea that many perceived as terrible, as PRL-like, repulsive and communist. And I was strongly attacked by the Church and by the right wing of Solidarity, and worshipped by former communists, who loved the fact that I was doing that and not just they, but a Solidarity activist like me as well. It just all got really mixed up, incredibly so, and it caused me a lot of trouble and difficulties in my political group. But at the same time, I believed that this issue needed to be taken care of, that it was difficult, and even more difficult because it got involved in all these political games. I was considered a traitor to Solidarity ideals, so in a sense it wasn't just about abortion, because suddenly it turned out that it was the main point of collision between the Solidarity people and former communists.

¹¹ **Movement for the Referendum:** created in the early 1990s by a wave of debates regarding a woman's right to abortion. Liberal and left-wing groups got involved in an initiative to carry out a popular referendum about the freedom of choice.

Linkages across national movements

2 clips (Loretta Ross and Barbara Limanowska)

LORETTA ROSS

00:49:57—00:53:47

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

Zakiya: Um-hum.

Loretta: ...and they use it in their activism, where in the United States, we tend to limit ourselves to the Constitutional framework of *Roe v. Wade*. And so as women of color, we went to Beijing and Cairo and came home wanting to use that human rights framework here at home. And we first coined the term, “reproductive justice” as a way to marry reproductive rights to social justice.

Zakiya: Um-hum.

Loretta: We did that in '94, and this was even before SisterSong. But once SisterSong got organized, we decided to intentionally popularize the reproductive justice framework, as a way to express the human rights framework in a U.S. context. Um, and then we started articulating a concept that we call reproductive oppression...

Zakiya: Hm.

Loretta: ...which is those human rights violations that not only keep a woman from deciding what happens to her body, but causes...calls attention to the fact that every time a woman is pregnant—actually every time a woman even thinks she's pregnant because misses a cycle...

Zakiya: Um-hum.

Loretta: ...she doesn't even actually have to be pregnant to start counting the calendar. But anyway, she is trying to figure out what she's going to do with this pregnancy in the context of what's happening in her community.

Zakiya: Um-hum.

Loretta: So if she's in a community that lacks access to healthcare...

Zakiya: Um-hum.

Loretta: ...if she's in a community that's suffering from immigration raids, or if she's in a community where there's a lot of violence and there's a lot of surveillance by the state or by the police...

Zakiya: Um-hum.

Loretta: ...she has to take all of that into account before she can talk about what's going to happen...

Zakiya: Um-hum.

Loretta: ...to her body or whether she's going to keep or not keep the child. Does she know if she tells her partner that she's pregnant, is she going to get beaten? If she tells her employer that she's pregnant, is she going to get fired? I mean, all of these are the calculations that women—all women, make by the way.

Zakiya: Um-hum.

Loretta: It's not just women of color. All women make these calculations. And so part of our criticism is that the pro-choice movement has removed all of those other complicating...

Zakiya: Yeah.

Loretta: ...factors from the discussion, as if it's only, "Can I have an abortion?" "Can I afford it?" and "Is it legal?" I mean, they...

Zakiya: Um-hum.

Loretta: ...just reduce that whole really complicated woman's life to that.

Zakiya: Um-hum. That's right.

Loretta: And that is an objectification very similar to what the right wing does.

Zakiya: Hm.

Loretta: Only they objectify the fetus and the women and we're objectifying the woman and the fetus. So I mean...

Zakiya: Hm.

Loretta: ...many of us offer a critique about the anti-abortion and the Pro-Choice Movement for objectifying women. So anyway, we draw attention to reproductive oppression, because reproductive oppression is economic violence. It's, you know, immigration raids, it's violence against women, it's removal of children from foster...into foster care. It's all of those things.

Zakiya: Yeah.

Loretta: The lack of affordable housing. The lack of childcare. All of these things form that...that quilt called reproductive oppression. And the only way to address reproductive oppression is through organizing people to protect their human rights.

BARBARA LIMANOWSKA

00:26:43—00:33:49

SW: What were you working on in Thailand?

BL: It was still before Thailand... In 1993, I think, when Teresa Oleszczuk¹² and I got involved in founding La Strada.¹³ It was this kind of... the first wave... or first news about the existence of something like trafficking in women in Eastern Europe. There was a Dutch organization Stichting Tegen Vrouwen Handel, which looked for contacts with organizations in Eastern Europe and particularly in Poland and in Czechoslovakia... 'cause it was still Czechoslovakia at that point...

SW: What year was that?

BL: Somewhere around 1990? 1991? Perhaps 1992? Well, no, it may have already been...

SW: 1991 perhaps...

BL: Anyway, I don't know, somewhere around then. They wanted to initiate contact, because they didn't know what to do with women from Eastern Europe who ended up in shelters and should be sent home, but it was unclear how to do it... And Teresa and I somehow got involved into trying to do something about it in Poland. It was kind of related to what the Polish Feminist Association was doing... we kind of did it on behalf of the Association. La Strada was created, and at the same time, I had some contacts with organizations working against women trafficking in other places. Among other things, something like GAATW was created (Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women).¹⁴ It was an international, global organization as the name indicates, and it was located in Bangkok. And they offered me some work on the project, which was supposed to look for links and trace certain mechanisms of human trafficking in Eastern Europe and Asia. We had this idea to go beyond the "first world," beyond the language and methodology, which kind of reflected Western feminist imagination, to look at it from some Eastern vantage point, and to try to describe this phenomenon, to work on it kind of... from the inside, from our perspective, without appropriating... or... or accepting the language, which, as we felt, didn't quite reflect what was really going on in trafficking. At this point, it was already kind of... since, after all, already in Beijing, there were terrible fights and discussions between the abolitionist option and this, let's say, human rights option; there were terrible fights... At the same time, it seemed to us that it was much more about economic issues, about immigrants' rights, and about the need to look at what's happening to people in this whole process of migration, or... or... work exploitation than it was about some big philosophical discussions. And we worked on this project for two years. In the beginning, in Bangkok, we did this conference "Asia – Eastern Europe" about trafficking, and later on, we also had meetings, seminars and contact talks between organizations... in Asia and Europe. We had a series of

¹² **Oleszczuk, Teresa:** Feminist scholar and writer and Project Coordinator for the La Strada Foundation against the trafficking in women.

¹³ **The La Strada Foundation Against Trafficking in Women, Poland:** an NGO working for the prevention of trafficking in women in Poland. The Warsaw office opened in Warsaw in 1995 as La Strada's pilot organization. La Strada aims to make the trafficking in women socially and politically visible and to influence public opinion and governing institutions so that trafficking in women is seen as a human rights violation.

¹⁴ **The Global Alliance Against Traffic of Women (GAATW)** is a network of non-governmental organizations and individuals from all regions of the world, who share a deep concern for the women, children and men whose human rights have been violated by the criminal practice of trafficking in persons. GAATW is committed to work for changes in the political, economic, social and legal systems and structures which contribute to the persistence of trafficking in persons and other human rights violations in the context of migratory movements for diverse purposes, including security of labor and livelihood.

meetings and training sessions in a few countries in Eastern Europe. Also later, after I got back from Bangkok, we were still organizing these meetings in Eastern Europe. And it was important, because while in Bangkok, we weren't really terribly successful in doing things without this Western influence, because Ally Miller¹⁵ was there with us. She was then with the International Human Rights Law Group,¹⁶ and... and Ally had a huge influence on what was going on. But we created this more of a human rights paradigm, and it was much more adequate, it seemed to us, or more adequately reflected the situation in trafficking than these... these theoretical disputes. Well, and later on, we were trying to have a conversation about this paradigm and to see how this way of thinking would be received in Eastern Europe... Well, and it is a similar way of doing things and thinking to those of La Strada, so... But to what extent was La Strada under the influence of what GAATW did? It's hard for me to say... It's possible that GAATW was more under the influence of La Strada. What we did was a result of La Strada's work in various countries, and we were just trying to somehow link it together. It was also when the first training manual was created. We made it to enable people to talk about and explain what trafficking in women was... and what could be done about it, so it was a very interesting project I have to say. Now, in retrospect, it was still very imperfect, but at the same time, it already included all the main elements that are still being debated till this day. So for the next ten years, we came up with very few new things when it comes to human trafficking. This thing in Bangkok and the first years of GAATW were really quite significant...

¹⁵ **Miller Alice M., JD:** assistant professor of Clinical Population and Family Health at the Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, where she focuses on gender, sexuality, human rights, and humanitarian issues. Miller also teaches at Columbia's Schools of Law and International and Public Affairs. Miller has worked for 20 years as a staff member or volunteer at NGOs including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the International Human Rights Law Group on human rights issues in the United States and globally. Her scholarship and advocacy has addressed gendering humanitarian law, safe migration and anti-trafficking policies, criminal law, and specifically abolition of the death penalty, women's rights, sexual and reproductive health, and LGBT rights. Source: <http://www.soros.org/initiatives/health/focus/sharp/about/morelaw> (accessed on May 28, 2006).

¹⁶ **The International Human Rights Law Group:** NGO globally concerned with Human Rights.

Representations of feminism and activism

2 clips (Neera Desai and Chen Mingxia)

NEERA DESAI

00:44:12—00:49:13

C.S.Lakshmi: What about the term “feminism” itself? Because I’m asking because when you published your book *Women in Modern India*, you asked one of the women you admired most – Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay – to write the introduction. And in one part of the introduction, she says that this book is wonderful and she has done very good work, but she says that the stand she is taking is a feminist stand. So I want to know how the term ‘feminist’ was understood at this time.

Neera: Lakshmi, it’s good, because I was from the beginning expecting that you should ask me this question since this has been the, I think bothering many people as to how this term “feminism” was used and how it came in my book and if you ask me, I would definitely say that when in 1957 that book was out and Kamaladevi wrote a beautiful introduction but with this proviso about feminism, and she labelled me as a feminist which I think I consider it as a very great tribute rather than a criticism. You see, Kamaladevi was allergic to the term “feminism,” not after the ’50s, but even in the ’40s she was allergic to the term, and she has categorically stated it elsewhere that, “We are not like feminists of the West, we are not anti-men, we are struggling for women’s rights, but we want men and women to go together”, but her other argument, and I think that although some of those leftists who were allergic to the word “feminism” was more because for them, economic independence, or economic equality, was prior to gender equality. And so, for Marxism also, the destruction of capitalism was more important than destruction of gender inequality. And so for them, to emphasize these gender questions while this whole struggle for economic independence, national independence, is going on, was, I think, diverting the whole history and that is how they were very much opposed to feminist movement. Because feminist movement was highlighting the gender inequality. And I would say that the gender inequality at that time was not as sharply challenged as it was in the ’70s. Actually, it was in the liberal framework which they were challenging and they just wanted the equal rights with men. They never challenged “Why this?” or they never asked this question. The movement had never asked this question at that time that what is the root of inequality? They have been always talking like liberals about because men and women are equal, because men have more rights, more opportunities to develop, we should have also the same and this is how the liberal framework and liberal feminism looked at the issue. Along with Kamaladevi, because one of the first statements came in the book called *Our Cause* edited by Shyamkumari Nehru in the late ’40s, and there she has written one special article on Women’s Movement in India at that particular [time]... and she is, she has categorically mentioned, Amrit Kaur also categorically mentions – many of them – Sarojini Naidu¹⁷ categorically mentions that we have nothing to do with feminism. In spite of the fact that they were, while raising the women’s issue, they were being challenged by the men.

¹⁷ An eminent poet and one among the most visible leaders of pre-Independent India. She was the President of the Indian National Congress and the first woman governor of free India. She was a passionate advocate for India, avidly mobilising support for Indian Independence abroad.

CHEN MINGXIA

00:00:34—00:02:21

Shi Tong: Professor Chen, thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview. First I would like to ask you to talk about your understanding of feminism: *nuquan zhuyi* or *nuxing zhuyi*.¹⁸

Chen Mingxia: This is a very interesting topic. I personally do not think that *nuquan zhuyi* and *nuxing zhuyi* have any essential differences. I feel that as for me, I am more willing to use the term *nuquan zhuyi*. Possibly this is because I am involved with the law. I believe that *nuquan zhuyi* strives for rights for women. Moreover striving for rights for women does not imply that women must take away men's rights, but instead women should strive for rights that they ought to have. In the past women were stripped of their rights. So as feminists, women must get up, and strive for their own rights. Through the women's movement and through all kinds of activities women should fight for and obtain the rights that they should have; and sometimes the campaign has to be done from the top down. To put it in my simple and direct way, I feel that *nuquan zhuyi* is a kind of set of ideas or practices that aim to struggle for rights that women deserve. You may call it an ideology, a movement, or a set of theories. I believe that it is a process, consisting of theory and practice. This is what I feel that *nuquan zhuyi* is. However there are many different kinds of feminism. This is because of different national histories and conditions, different social contexts in which feminism emerges, and differences in terms of group and class. I do not want to spend too much time talking about these differences here; we are all familiar with this. People who are involved with feminism, both those that invoke *nuxing zhuyi* and *nuquan zhuyi*, are all very clear about this and they understand this sort of situation. So I do not want to talk too much about this issue. This is my view.

¹⁸ There are two terms that can be translated as "feminism." *Nuxing zhuyi* is literally "female-ism" or "feminine-ism." This translation emerged in the early twentieth century but reemerged in the 1980s. Some believe that this term has less political but more biological connotations than *nuquan zhuyi*. *Nuquan zhuyi* is literally "woman-rights-ism" Since *quan* can mean both rights and power, the term can be interpreted as the "ism" of women's power and rights. In history, the Chinese Communist Party has defined *nuquan zhuyi* as bourgeois, because of the potential conflicts between gender struggles and class struggles. In contemporary China, this term is primarily used to refer to Western feminism and often conveys a negative image of a men-hating woman hungry for power. For this reason, many Chinese feminists avoid calling themselves *nuquan zhuyi zhe*. See Ping-chun Hsiung, Maria Jaschok, et.al, eds. *Chinese Women Organizing* (2001) and Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment* (1999) for detailed historical reviews.

Bios for the Interviewee clips

Activist-educator **Andrea Smith** was born in San Francisco and grew up in southern California. She holds a B.A. in Comparative Study of Religion from Harvard University, a Masters of Divinity from Union Theological Seminary¹⁹, and a PhD in History of Consciousness²⁰ from University of California – Santa Cruz. Smith combines her activism with her scholarly work, dividing her time between fighting for human rights for indigenous and Third World peoples and teaching students how to be engaged and socially responsible global citizens. She served as a delegate to the United Nations World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, representing the Indigenous Women’s Network and the American Law Alliance. She is one of the founding members of INCITE -Women of Color Against Violence²¹, and is the co-founder of the Chicago chapter of Women of All Red Nations²². Smith has organized a number of conferences that bring community activists, public intellectuals and academics into dialogue with one another. Most notable among these efforts are the Color of Violence conferences, the Race Gender and War Community Forum, and De-Colonizing Methodology and Beyond: Constructive Proposals for Indigenous Methodologies. Andrea Smith has won numerous awards for her scholarship and her activism. She currently resides in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where she holds a joint appointment in Women’s Studies and the Program of American Culture at the University of Michigan.

Cathy J. Cohen is Professor of Political Science and Director of the Center for the Study of Race, Politics and Culture at the University of Chicago. Before going to the University of Chicago, Cohen taught for nine years at Yale University. Cohen is the third African-American woman in Yale’s three-hundred year history to receive tenure, and the first in the social sciences to ever receive tenure at Yale. In all of her work, Professor Cohen attempt to speak to and bridge her many identities and communities, exploring the possibility and difficulties of joint political struggles. Her field of academic specialization is American Politics, and her interests include African-American politics, women and politics, lesbian and gay politics, social movements, and black feminist theory. She is the author of the book, *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics*, which was named one of the top hundred books on African Americans of the 20th century. Professor Cohen is also co-editor of *Women Transforming Politics*, an alternative reader. Professor Cohen’s political involvements similarly challenge identity-based movements to recognize and act on the diversity within their membership. She is the former co-chair and a founding board member of the Audre Lorde Project in New York, an organization committed to progressive organizing around queer issues across communities of color. She served on the board of “Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press”, and the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies at CUNY. Cohen was a founding member of Black AIDS Mobilization,

¹⁹ Founded in 1836 Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York(UTS) was founded with the intention of focusing on the problems presented in the urban setting. It is specifically based in the Protestant Reformed tradition.

²⁰ An interdisciplinary doctoral program at University of California at Santa Cruz focused on social theory. Currently, it is the only doctoral program of its kind in the United States and the professors affiliated with it include famous Black liberationist Angela Davis.

²¹ A radical women of color organization working to stop violence against women in all its forms including war and state intervention. See <http://www.incite-national.org> .

²² This organization, which grew out of AIM in the 1970s, focuses on issues affecting American Indian women; however, as local groups began campaigning on behalf of American Indian men, the national agenda of WARN in the mid-1990s also included issues such as respect for American Indian men and their culture in prison.

also known as BAM, and a core organizer of the international conference “Black Nations, Queer Nations”. Cohen has also served as an active member in many organizations, such as the Black Radical Congress, African-American Women in Defense of Ourselves, and the United Coalition Against Racism.

Ai Xiaoming, born in 1953, is a feminist literary scholar who publishes widely and has been active in developing women’s studies curriculum and promoting women’s rights. Professor Ai is the co-producer and director of the Chinese version of *The Vagina Monologues*, a play staged in China as one of the activities of the Stop Domestic Violence network. She was also involved in an important legal case that popularized the concept of “date rape.” At the time of this interview, Professor Ai is Deputy Director of the Women’s Studies Center and director of the Sex/Gender Education Forum in Zhongshan University, Guangzhou. She has recently taken on a documentary film project that aims to document women’s grassroots activism nationwide.

Neera Desai is a pioneer in the field of Women’s Studies and a nationally and internationally known scholar. She set up the first Research Centre for Women’s Studies in SNDT Women’s University, was its first Director, and served in that capacity for many years. Her much-acclaimed research works have been published in Gujarathi and English. She is 78 years old and is currently working on a book based on interviews conducted with more than one hundred feminists in the western region of India on the social construction of feminist ideology.

Barbara Labuda was born near Wroclaw, Poland in 1949. She studied Romance languages in Poznan, Poland as well as Ecole Normale Superieure in Paris, France. Labuda became active in anti-communist organizations in the 1970s for which she was imprisoned in 1982. In 1996, she began serving in President Aleksander Kwasniewski’s Cabinet. She admits that the anticommunist organizations with which she worked did not support women’s rights for which she has actively and publicly criticized and chastised them, often to her political and personal disadvantage. She has a son and lives in Warsaw. She is currently Poland’s ambassador to Luxembourg.

Loretta Ross is an activist on women’s issues including reproductive justice, human rights, and opposition to hate groups and right wing organizations. In the 1970s, Ross was one of the first African American women to direct a rape crisis center. In the 1980s, she served a director Women of Color Programs for the National Organization for Women, organizing the first national conference on women of color and reproductive rights in 1987. She successfully organized women of color delegations for the massive pro-choice marches NOW sponsored in 1986 and 1989, and in 2004, she was national co-director of the March for Women’s Lives in Washington, DC, the largest protest march in U.S. history with more than one million participants. From 1990 to 1995, Loretta served as National Program Research Director for the Atlanta-based Center for Democratic Renewal. She directed projects on far right organizations in South Africa, the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi involvement and anti-abortion violence in the U.S. Following this, she founded the National Center for Human Rights Education, a training and resources center for grassroots activists. She is co-author of the book *Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organizing for Reproductive Justice*. Ross is currently writing a book on reproductive rights entitled *Black Abortion*. A graduate of Howard University, in 2003, Ross received an honorary Doctorate of Civil Law from Arcadia University. Loretta is a founding member of and

current national coordinator of SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective, a network of over 70 women of color allied organizations that work on reproductive health issues.

Barbara Limanowska was born in 1958 in Olsztyn, Poland. She studied Art History (1977-1982) at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan. In 1984, she immigrated to Holland where she participated in the squatters movement and collaborated on feminist projects in Poland. She returned to Poland and in 1993 and co-founded *La Strada*, a foundation committed to fighting trafficking in women. She has worked with *La Strada* and various other anti-human trafficking organizations in Poland, Thailand, and the former Yugoslavia.

Chen Mingxia, born in 1948, is a researcher at the Institute for Legal Research of the China Academy of Social Sciences. Active in promoting women's legal rights, Professor Chen was one of the leaders who initiated an anti-domestic violence project which eventually developed into the first large scale women's NGO in China, Stop Domestic Violence. Until recently, she headed this first national women's network. She has also played an important role in gender training programs for legal scholars nationwide.