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Audio quality: Great

Moderator questions in Bold, Respondents in Regular text.

KEY: Unable to decipher = (ia + timecode), **Phonetic spelling** = (ph + timecode), **Missed word** = (mw + timecode).

Moderator: About to start. It's Friday 7th February 2020 and I'm with Akima Thomas. Akima is the founder and clinical director of Women and Girls Network, which is a holistic therapeutic service working with women and girls surviving violence. Akima is sharing her experience of working in the women's voluntary and community sector and campaigning for women's rights for the Sister's Doing it for Themselves archive. Akima, if we can begin by you saying something about what influenced your decision to work in the sector and for women's rights.

Akima Thomas: Yes. I guess it's been a long personal journey, which begins in childhood. It begins with my own experiences as a survivor, it begins with witnessing lots of discrimination, lots of challenges, lots of violence that I witnessed throughout my childhood. So, that was the beginnings for me. It naturally meant that there was only one option open to you as a child of the sixties, which was about the nursing profession. So, I entered the nursing profession and that was a wonderful time for me. It was also, the shadow side of being a healer was being in somewhere like A&E, where we were taught to sew up women who had self-harmed, without any anaesthetic. We had to do stomach pumps without any muscle relaxants. So, really being, kind of, quite abusive. So, it would be conversations like, 'If they want to abuse themselves, let's see whether they like this.' So, a really harsh mentality in the hospital profession, in the medical profession. I was always interested about, why was I seeing the same women, what was happening for them emotionally? We were obviously missing something about their experiences. I also had my own experiences as a nurse, as a professional, about being really racially abused, abused in terms of the hierarchy of the medical profession, in terms of, you know, the doctors were absolute Gods and nurses were these mortals that were less than.

So, that, kind of, rigid hierarchical structure really hit me as, 'Why am I doing all of the work and the men are walking around smoking cigars on the ward?' So, this really, kind of, polarisation of individuals, in terms of that gender stratification. So, I guess those things, for me, and again for my experiences of childhood, felt unfair. So, those were the things that were unfair for me. During that time, there were lots of civil rights movements and, certainly, as a youth, I wanted to be part of the Black Panther movement in school. That was really an important influence and I remember trying to be like Angela Davies and sellotape my hair up. I got soft hair, mixed parentage, and I wanted an afro to show that black solidarity. So, I'd grown from that politics of activism and that, actually, people could take back power. I understood socialism as a very young individual as well, growing up, and thought that these were just and right ways of behaving and being in the world. Obviously, around that time,

you have the rise of women's liberation and women were starting to talk about their experiences.

Black women were in the black civil right's movement, we're starting to talk about, actually, how the same brothers in the struggle were still brutalising, still raping women. So, I understood these things as, you know, 'Well, actually, that's not really not right. How can we have black liberation on one hand and the discrimination and the oppression of women on the other hand?' Again, you've got that civil rights movement and the Women's Liberation Movement coming to the fore. So, I naturally identified with that. I naturally identified with the movement for women's liberation in terms of being a lesbian as well, which was another critical time in terms of my political development. That person with the political, in terms of, you know, ensuring that kind of continuity of self, in terms of thinking about, it's not just about your political understanding on a conscious level, but also your political understanding as an individual, as a women. So, all of those aspects came together for me. The Women's Liberation Movement gave me a voice and the power to be my authentic self, and that was as a lesbian. So, those things charted my journey. Would it be useful to talk about those that influenced me at that time?

Moderator: Yes.

Akima Thomas: So, I guess, really, a main influence for me was Angela. Angela Davies was a great influence, in terms of me understanding about the politics of race and the politics of being a woman. It was quite an essential element for my understanding about contextualising my experiences. Also, around that time, around my political awakening, there was separatist politics. So, there were lesbians who were choosing to live outside of the patriarchal norm of being totally independent and separated from anything to do with men. I didn't always necessarily agree with that politic but certainly loved the sentiment of women only spaces, of women healing one another. So, really about the articulation, about the power of womanhood, was quite important for my political awareness. Audre Lorde was, maybe, my next important influence. Audre Lorde's words were very powerful and remain very powerful for me at the time. She articulated lots of things and brought in lots of different elements. We would call that an intersectional approach now, but definitely it was about an understanding of womanhood. It was an understanding as a black woman and then it was an understanding as a lesbian. So, all of those elements were represented in, 'Zami, I Call My Name.' So, that was a very influential and important aspect of my political understanding of myself, and of other women, and of the work, and of my position in society. So, those were quite key elements for me, that formed where I was going to go in terms of developing a service.

Moderator: So, you've talked about what happened before you joined the women's sector. Can you describe what happened next? How did you join the women's sector?

Akima Thomas: Yes. Well, I guess it was, like, in those unorthodox places of parties, of a black lesbian social life, of those gatherings where those thought processes, where those understandings, where older sisters were talking to us as younger sisters about individuals like Audre Lorde. Who were stating to think about, you know, activism. I guess one of the things that was happening at the time, and I was very fortunate to be around at that time, was it was about the understanding that, actually, two things. One, about women's spaces and the

importance of those. Secondly, about survivor's spaces and the importance of those as well. So, that was quite a key thing for me, to be involved in that activism. I studied social work under Liz Kelly and also had that whole rhetoric of women and violence, and childhood violence. She'd run the child sexual abuse unit at North London Polytechnic. North London Polytechnic was a fever field place of revolutionary activists. I wanted to ensure that (TC 10.00) I'd done something that was going to be sustainable. I never wanted to be a social worker. I'd come out of nursing because I couldn't stand the brutality of it, I couldn't stand its rigidity. I felt as if I wanted to do something around activism, so I went into social work. As a social worker, I started thinking about, 'Well, actually, how can I use this opportunity and this time that I've got for feminist activism?' Which is really where Women and Girls Network started.

It started with us sitting around a kitchen table and a lot of black women talking about, 'What if.' 'What if we had a service that really reflected us?' 'What if that service was doing something very different to the medical model that's around for survivors at the moment?' 'What if we had a space that was run by black women for black women?' So, that really was, for me, like, 'Actually, yes, I'm going to really do this.' We would play poker, we would drink hard, we would play reggae music until all hours of the morning. That's where Women and Girls Network was born. In that place, in that understanding. So, I think it was like a crucible of feminist activism but we just didn't want to keep it in our head, we actually wanted to make something happen. So, myself and a group of like minded women started thinking about Women and Girls Network, in terms of how we would get funding. We had a variety of different names but, actually, we wanted those essential things at the centre of the organisation.

At that centre, we would be a collective, and that was, again, really important for us about, you know, not betraying our socialist politics and not betraying our sense of feminism. Then, in terms of that equality and lessening those hierarchies. So, that's really how Women and Girls Network was established, around those essential principles of non-hierarchical, of empowerment, of the person with the political. We wanted, at one point, to be wearing, and this is really interesting, we all wanted to wear orange boiler suits. This was before orange is the new black. So, that's really a funny thing. So, every time I see that I think, 'Wow, we were really visionary.' We didn't want to have hierarchies, we certainly didn't want pink boiler suits, but we also wanted something bright. We also wanted to make sure that anyone from cleaners, to anyone within the service had that same access to power. Obviously, it didn't quite go like that, but that was our beginnings.

Moderator: One of the first examples of, I suppose, collective action for women was the first refuge. Did the first refuge influence your decision at all?

Akima Thomas: I guess not, because one of the things that we felt about the whole stuff that was happening at the time, it was very polarised at that time. So, it was very polarised around domestic violence and about these women who were victims and are using that, and who were fleeing violence. I think there was something that didn't influence us actually. What influenced us more was the Rape Crisis Movement, because it was a rape crisis movement, because it was stating very clearly that we're not going to be standing for, not only sexual violence, but all the things that come with sexual violence as well. From harassment, to

pornography, to child sexual abuse. So, for me, for Network, that felt like a much more activated and activism-led movement. The first refuge never claimed to be a movement, it just claimed to provide refuge for those who were escaping domestic violence. So, that really wasn't our mark. Markers for us were Cleveland, which was the first time that we were made aware of a mass scale of child sexual abuse, and paedophile rings, and ritual abuse, and that not being taken seriously. That the individuals, and there were hundreds of individuals that gave testimony, there were hundreds that were brutalised in that ritual abuse. It felt unconceivable to us that all of those individuals were lying. So, that really was, I think, for Women and Girls Network, a trigger point for the activation of Women and Girls Network.

Moderator: You've touched a little bit on this. You've said that Audre Lorde and Angela Davies were inspiration to you.

Akima Thomas: Yes.

Moderator: Was there anybody else who inspired you and why? Who currently inspires you?

Akima Thomas: Who also inspired was June Jordan. That collective of black women writers, Pat Parker, you know, they had very potent and powerful images and words that set the movement, I believe, on fire. Audre Lorde's words were, 'You can't dismantle the master's house with the master's tools.' That became a really important galvanising point for Women and Girls Network. We understood about manmade theories and we were always talking about manmade theories. Meaning that it was almost like men's ways of understanding violence and the causes of interpersonal violence always became a narrative of excusing male behaviour. Of legitimising male privilege and denigrating women's voices as lying or fantasy world. So, those were really quite important things in terms of the beginnings of Women and Girls Network, in terms of, actually, we want to go against that. How we saw that model was about very much entrenched in the medical model. So, we wanted to do anything that moved away from that medical model. I'm jumping decades, but a little bit later is a very powerful writer who writes in the early nineties, is Judith Lewis Herman. She's got to be probably one of the most singular writers that influenced us. Her first book, I think it's called-, it's a really famous book, it's around rape and daughter incest, you know, 'Father daughter Incest' I think it's called.

It's really influential because, all of a sudden, you've got this Harvard professor of Psychology, who's a psychiatrist, who's saying, 'Actually, the biggest thing that is happening is the amount of incest that is happening within families.' It's not since Freud, have you had someone who's been talking about incest. We know that Freud recants his stories about women's narratives, about their stories of incest. So, he describes them as being hysterics, and we understand the politics of why that would be so, but you've got somebody in the twentieth century who's clearly saying that lots of women experience incest in their family home. So, that was really an important point for us. She goes further in her book that comes out in 1994, which is Trauma and Recovery, you know, which, again, was a very powerful book for us. It gave us a road map, even, of how to deliver services. So, that was, you know, I've got to say, she was probably one of the most influential writers in terms of the practice of Women and Girls Network at the time. So, the practice in terms of our therapy and how we organise our

clinical model was influenced by Judith Lewis Herman. The politics, now, was an integration of that cohort of black feminists at the time, and we, you know, looked to Bell Hooks, was another writer, Patricia Hill Collins was another writer.

So, all of those black women writers were, kind of, quite essential for us. We tended not to go with more white feminist writers because I think at the time we were really concerned about white feminism not speaking for us as black women so that was quite important to have an organisation that was black-led, which is still where we're at. So, those were our main influencers and individuals like Sarah Nelson. Sarah Nelson is important because she's probably one of the first social work practitioners in this country that starts talking about (TC 20.00) Cleveland and what happened, as well as Beatrice Campbell. Again, a really significant thinking around what's happening around violence so, yes. So, Erin Pizzey and that whole movement is not in our consciousness so those were the main individuals. For now, what can I say, who can I say is mine. It's still those individuals, Angela Y Davis, I'm still banging to her. I think she's still very relevant to my thinking but, I guess, I've expanded to include, yes, different individuals who were influencing my thinking. Natasha Hay is somebody I think who's, kind of, quite important, who works a lot around intersectionality. The same way that Patricia Hill Collins continues to influence my thinking as an intersectional feminist. So, there's been a couple of those more common ones.

I'd have to, probably, maybe, think a bit more about who are my influences at the moment but, maybe, you know, women within my community. So, still Liz Kelly, still Marai Larasi is still an influence for me. Sabrina Qureshi, again, is an influence for me, as is Viv from the Women's Resource Centre as well. Again, I think that they're women that I admire, that I have those conversations with who keep me in check, who inspire my thinking as well. So, yes.

Moderator: Moving on to leadership, can you describe your leadership style?

Akima Thomas: Well, my leadership style.

Moderator: Your approach to leadership.

Akima Thomas: Yes, I think it must be based on those same feminist principles. I've tried to be as authentic as I can to that about, you know, really enshrining things like empowerment or re-empowerment but really being conscious of power and how that can get played out in relationships. So, trying to be, as much as I can, non-hierarchical. So, we do have a hierarchy, so I am one of the directors, there's two directors, we ensured that we have a flat top at the top of Women and Girls Network because we didn't want to have a CEO with all of that power invested in the one individual.

I think, you know, the movement from a collection because it wasn't functioning in the way that it needed to function and it was just about clarity and accountability in terms of thinking, 'Actually, that system isn't fit for us. We need something else to happen'. We were very concerned about survivors being, you know, not abused but, you know, about their energy not being used in a way that meant that they came to services just purely for healing. So, it was important for us to have maybe a round discussion table, I would imagine. I still like the idea of a kitchen table, I still like the idea of, maybe for Women and Girls Network and my

leadership style, is definitely about collaboration, mutuality, a really, kind of, clear transparency and accountability are really clear things for me as one of the leaders of Women and Girls Network.

I think we're all leaders in different ways so that's really important for me to validate and to ensure that others have space to have their voice. I think there's an old adage of that way that geese fly in formation and they have a leader who takes all the brunt of the wind, and then that one goes to the back so they can rest and another one goes to that frontal place. I would like to think that that kind of process happens with Women and Girls Network. It's a slower process but those are really important ways that, maybe, we would see the formation of the leadership at Women and Girls Network.

I think it's important to have strong ideas, to have strong values, to have those competencies right at the heart of Women and Girls Network, and I think as a leader, it's been really important for me to hear the different voices. Also, how I harmonise those voices as well because there's also elements and fractions that can occur within Women and Girls Network. We're 120 so, you know, there's a lot of different voices to be heard so we've had to, maybe, modify how we do those voices. But, for myself it's been really important to be connected, as much as I can, so I have, like for example, I try to have case management, have times with every single team, I do all the induction programmes, so that everybody within the organisation knows who I am. It's really important.

I think those are the things that, kind of, level but I think there's other sentiments in which we're built on in terms of making sure that survivors are also involved in, yes, hearing, being involved in Women and Girls Network as well so that's been important. For me as a leader, it isn't just about leading from the front, it's maybe about supporting from behind. That's how I would like to think my legacy as a leader is.

Moderator: Can you give an example of how you think you have successfully supported from behind? What does supporting from behind look like?

Akima Thomas: Yes because I think it's really been important to not have hierarchies where, actually, there's only one voice that is Women and Girls Network. I think anybody out there knows that it's very potent managers who have that space, so that's been quite important. There's not one figure head, that we try to make sure that, you know, others have those opportunities for keynote speaking, for being in different forums so that, for me, is a clear way that that's supporting from behind.

It's about our ability to mentor, to coach, from inside the organisation. It's that reluctance not to have charismatic leaders who articulate everything for the organisation. That's been really important to have that more widespread way that practitioners have been able to take their rightful place so, yes, and it's been important to have a flat top leadership. You know, I've been at the organisation for a very long time, I make sure that, and it's not even me making sure, I think it's naturally evolved, that I am just one of the managers. So, I think Gurpreet, who is the other Director, that we both hold joint responsibility and, maybe, it's interesting because maybe I don't see myself as a leader. It's, kind of, quite an important thing, yes. I take

responsibility and I'm responsible but I don't necessarily believe in the leadership culture. I think it would be really important, yes.

Moderator: So, how do you think women approach leadership and how is that different from men's leadership?

Akima Thomas: Yes, yes. I think there's something about our leadership which is invigorating because it's about cooperation. I think men, and we would understand, I think when we're not following male lines of leadership, you know. So, it's like, you know, you can have Margaret Thatcher was a leader, was in that prime minister position, but, actually, run things entirely under that male, patriarchal way of leading. I think when we have a good woman who's working from a more intuitive, feminine, womanist way of leadership. Not necessarily identifying as a feminist. There's something about cooperation, there's something about power alongside, not power over, there's something about that collaboration so I think there's something about women wanting to be much more involved.

I think women's leadership, and I should have said this for myself as well, involves a lot more about relationships. Relationships are right at the core and those positive relationships, I think there's something that's, kind of, quite nurturing, that's quite holding, that's quite (TC 30.00), yes, supportive and nurturing. I think those are the requirements for us as women leaders. I don't think male structures of leadership follow that. It's about competitiveness, it's about a binary system of those who have and those who don't. It's always a positive and a negative, you know, it's always in those, kind of, polarities. I think women try to be much more harmonious and create balance, and want something in that in-between places. I think we're really good at looking and searching in those in-between places, yes.

Moderator: You've touched on this earlier on, but what are the issues that are dear to your heart, and how do you think you and the Women and Girls Network have influenced change?

Akima Thomas: What are the factors that are dear to my heart? It's still the same factors from when I was maybe a fourteen-year old, which was about, crystallised then, for me, and is still the same now, which is about social justice, you know. It's about equality, it's about reparations and repairing those things that happen in society and I think the more that we continue along paths of those who have and those who don't, and those individuals then who fall through that gap. So, those are really important things that are still very close to my heart and, obviously, that gets played out for me, in terms of issues around violence against women and girls, that's, kind of, quite an important thing for me in terms of, you know, that continuation, that steady influence of male privilege and entitlement that still gets played out in terms of violence. It's still the thing that gets me up out of my bed every Monday morning, you know, and probably on a Saturday morning as well.

So, there's something about that drive and about, you know, feeling like a warrior in terms of, you know, 'I didn't start this fight, but I'm involved in this fight' is really important, you know. So, those things are still, kind of, influential for me in terms of, you know, our work isn't done, and I'm very sad that our work isn't done. I feel that it's my life's energy to ensure that we're working towards ending violence against women and girls, absolutely. So, those

are really something quite pivotal for me, at the core of what I do personally and that being amplified by what Women and Girls Network does.

I think Women and Girls Network's success is that we've been honest. We've been honest about the things that we can't do, we've been honest and passionate about the things that we can do. I think at the heart of what we do is about our revolutionary love, our love for women, our love for ensuring that we're creating safe, welcoming spaces for women to heal and recover from their experiences of violence but, more than that, that our imagining of ourself is about us as activists. So, every survivor that comes through the doors of Women and Girls Network, we consider as an activist, she's a potential next generation. She's the next lineage that belongs at Women and Girls Network. We feel that this space is really important to hold survivors in terms of their work. That that's maybe a fruition of the healing process is that they can come to us as survivors and they leave as thrivers, and they come back into our service as a member of the team doing this work. That's really important and I think we've always been bold and clear about that.

We've always been bold and clear that, actually, we want to deliver a quality service with no compromises. We've compromised in places because we've had to adapt but the core of us still retains that boldness around our feminist politics, our intersectional politics. We've always wanted to take ourselves really seriously in terms of leading innovation, of taking risks. So, I think those have been something that have been really important for Women and Girls Network in terms of, yes, that drive to be doing something different. The way that we hold survivors is of care, of a continuum of care right from the beginning to the end.

I think what we've contributed is that way back in the late 80's and early 90's, we understood that women's healing needed to be a mind, body and a soul level. We knew that crimes of violence against women were injuries that bruised the soul and that we needed to work in different kinds of ways with different communities, from different cultures and I think that has been really, kind of, influential in our thinking. So, we still think about our healing, you know, commissioners talk about holistic work. Haven't got a clue what they mean by holistic work, for us it's very important about that individual as mind, body and soul, and working on those different levels. So, I think that's a fundamental way that Women and Girls Network has influenced this sector. You've got other organisations who then started introducing body therapies. We were doing body therapies, you know, way back in the 90's, you know, ten years before others thought of it. We were also considered to be, kind of, they talked about us with our alternative therapies and we've always been bold around that.

So, I think that's probably our enduring legacy, about being really holistic and really committed to that, and our boldness about our black leadership has been really important. Making sure that we're providing services for BME women and that being, kind of, really specific, really important work that we've done. So, yes. Yes.

Moderator: So, you've influenced in terms of the individual, in terms of practice, what do you think your influence has been in terms of the wider society? Do you think there's been any influence?

Akima Thomas: Absolutely. Of course because, you know, the women who come into Women and Girls Network are mothers, daughters, sisters, partners, are CEOs, are barristers, are doctors, every kind of woman that you can think of, you know. Each one of those I think have had the love, the nurturing, the care, the healing and have gained something from Women and Girls Network. I feel, kind of, quite proud that actually, you know, most women have a very positive experience with us and so I feel that there are lots of influence that those survivors have had in terms of their experiences here. I think that that's made a, kind of, seismic shift. I think our thinking has been really bold and has been really at the forefront, maybe of the VAWG movement. We started as a very small organisation but with very big ambitions. I think that that has influenced commissioners who have heard of us, who've attended our training. That's always been really important to us, to have a vibrant training programme. We had accredited training before anyone else did and that was really important for us. Not to just be in those passive positions but to actually influence professionals so again, I think we've, kind of, influenced the next generation of social workers of thinkers in the VAWG sector absolutely. So, I think, absolutely we've had that influencing reach to many different areas, yes.

Moderator: Going back to leadership, what do you think are the specific characteristics of being the leader in the women's sector?

Akima Thomas: Someone who can dance with unicorns is quite essential. So, that means who's ready for an adventure, who can see magic, who is a visionary, who's innovative, who's not afraid, who's quite bold, who'd competent, who's loving and gentle and kind. Who doesn't take themselves too seriously, I think there's something about humility, you know, in this world. And I don't mean that in terms of martyrdom. It is something about feeling that you're part of a movement and I think it's interesting that there's a lot of emphasis on leadership and I guess, you know, for me I'm trying to dispel that, that we all have those qualities of leadership and how that gets reflected in all members of the team but I guess there is something about passion and compassion are, kind of, quite (TC 40.00) important things as well in terms of being able to bring others together is quite a skill I think in terms of forming those relationships and maintaining those relationships I think is, kind of, something quite important. I've seen leaders in the sector who are just on their own crusade, who are really divorced and separated from their workforce, from the women that they're representing. I don't think that that's good leadership or they think around creating their own individual empires. For me, leadership as a feminist is-, I don't think Women and Girls Network has given this sufficient time, I think it's a learning, a growing point for us is about how do you have that accountability without having that leadership. How do you ensure that the power distribution, how do you ensure that all parts of the service are communicating with one another.

Moderator: How has your involvement in this sector impacted on you personally?

Akima Thomas: I've grown as an individual, I don't believe that I've ever been burnt out and that's been really important to me. I've worked as a therapist at Women and Girls Network and I've always had a-, survivors that I've worked with and lately I've not been able to do individual work, so I've done group work and that's been really important to me. I don't think women burn us out or survivors burn us out. I think Babylon and the state system is a thing

that burns us out. It's about the injustices, those are the things that burn us out. So, I don't feel as if I've had any negative impact. I think it's been an absolutely enriching experience for me. I think I've learnt so much about myself, about the best of humanity. I hear the worst of humanity and I hear the best of humanity. I think it's given me a pride about myself. I think it's given me a relief about the goodness of the world. I mean it's just been really just been the making of me. I think that I would never ever do anything different, maybe I'd get a pension earlier but I wouldn't-, having this time again, I'd do exactly the same thing again. So, I think, for me, it's been entirely positive. It has meant that I've had to make compromises in my personal life and I've had to work too hard but actually I don't know whether that is a compromise. I think, you know, I would rather have not and I certainly think for the next generation they're a bit more boundaried and absolutely that's really good for them but I've got nothing but positivity to say about my time and experiences.

Moderator: How has the Women and Girls Network and the women's sector as whole influenced and changed women's structural position in the UK?

Akima Thomas: Wow. I want to say considerably and I want to say the exact opposite as well because I think those two truths are what has happened. I think, you know, that we've made so many in roads in terms of awakening a different consciousness around the causes of violence. In terms of thinking about structural oppression, in terms of thinking about more ecological framework and not just individual perpetrator but community, society, patriarchy and how that forms. I think we've done lots around reducing, understanding around neo-liberalism and the importance of collective and solidarity. I think we've been resistance building. I think we've been solid, change makers for good, absolutely. I think we've brought light to many issues around VAWG and to many issues that dispel myths around women's personality, understandings of who they might be in the world and given us a more expansive view of ourselves but similarly I think as time has gone by that those gains have been repealed by austerity. I think they've been repelled because of the will of men. I think they've cottoned onto feminism and I think they've become much more entrenched. So, if you talk to young people and it's not, you know, stereotypically casting a shadow over their lives but they are moving back into those much more gendered roles, the rise of gangs and how structured and hierarchical they are, how they've abused young women and continue to abuse young women. So, I think, that the likes of Harvey Weinstein have we really got understanding around the Me Too movement and how is that-, so we've got those kind of gains, that kind of publicity but how does that translate when we have a judge, a little while ago, who talks about a woman in an abusive relationship, not experiencing sexual violence because she didn't resist. So, I think that, kind of, suggests where we are. We've still got two women a week killed, how can that be? The amount of femicides that are happening and also if we think about that on a global level, so we have all of this understanding now. All of this awareness but actually that's not being translated into action and maybe for us, we're activated as women and it's now for men to get activated. They need their own men's liberation. They need to clear up their shit, for sure. So, I don't know.

Moderator: What do you think have been the greatest achievements of the women's collective action?

Akima Thomas: We've got a refuge provision, we've got a crisis movement, we've got other organisations like Women and Girls Networks. So, we've had quite a lot of money pumped into the sector but it's never been enough to ameliorate what's actually happening. So, those two juxtapositions so-, can you repeat it? What have been the gains?

Moderator: What do you think have been the greatest achievements of women's collective action?

Akima Thomas: Of women's collective action. I don't quite know what that means in terms of Million Women Rise, are we talking about, what are we-,

Moderator: Generally, I suppose, from the suffragettes onwards.

Akima Thomas: Yes. Of course, there is always things for us and our belief in ourselves and our ability to fight back and create movements and meaning making movements. So, I think Million Women Rise is a point in question in terms of, you know, our being able to take back power, take control of the streets, create that solidarity that others can see. So, I think that's been really important in terms of-, I'm not sure about the waves of women's liberation. In terms of the suffragette movement, of first wave, second wave. Who cares what wave we're on of feminism but I guess for me there's always something progressive. You've always got a very solid formed strength of women that are always protesting. You find us protesting against austerity, you will find us protesting about what's happening with the NHS and it's always going to be women who are forming those spaces. So, absolutely, that has been really essential. I think it's like a constant tide that's always pushing back, absolutely. I don't know where we would be without that actually.

Moderator: What do you think still needs to be done?

Akima Thomas: Lots, lots. It's not good just pumping money (TC 50.00), you know, so like Women and Girls Network has been very fortunate with the-, touch wood, with the funding that we've attracted but it feels piecemeal because it's no good for us just to be able to heal women in one of our pretty looking spaces as she goes back to living under a cupboard underneath somebody's stairs. So, how are we ensuring that structural justice is happening so that women have got access to decent housing, have access to medical support that have the judiciary and the police on their side. That's a really big thing for us. A really big thing that the police are still lackadaisical, that women no longer or still don't get the justice that they deserve, that we have perpetrators walking around with immunity. That the attitudes of young people of older generations have remained, I kind of feel intact in terms of still supporting that male privilege, that male entitlement. We still have those hierarchies, we still have patriarchy. Patriarchy isn't going away, this is the thing for us and we need to understand how big and how endemic and how weaved it is into all of our systems. So, we need to be really in tune with how we start dismantling that. So, there's still an awful lot for us to be done. I don't think it necessarily happens in the spaces like this because it's too small scale. So, I think it is about how we upscale this, about how we have that feminist activism I think is needed, much more fronty. I'm just thinking about, what are they called? That ecological resistance rebellious movement. Look at what they did, they stopped bridges, they bought traffic to a

standstill. So, we need that kind of activism that gets into people's psyche. That's what we're missing at the moment.

Moderator: What are your thoughts on the future for women's rights?

Akima Thomas: I don't think we should tolerate what we have. I think it's very piecemeal, we don't have-, well we've still got, you know, the companies have said that they're not going to meet that quota for having women representing at board level while we still have disparities in incomes between male and female, you know, in men and women. While we still have our children brutalised in schools. While we still don't have our girls achieving what they should, while we still have the class structure that we do. Then I think it just perpetuates itself so there is something still and I think it's at about that point in activism and it's maybe not going to happen in my lifetime. But it needs to be quite seismic. I think it's interesting about the way that-, and I'm very pleased and happy that we're moving towards, you know, other revolutionaries about the way that we eat, about the vehicles that we're going to be using in the future and a carefulness about how we're treating the planet. That's what we need to have, that seismic change in attitudes but that's also backed up by structures and policy and legislation.

Moderator: That's the end of the interview unless there is anything less you would like to add.

Akima Thomas: I don't know, I feel as if I've mumbled on but anyway. It would have been to have more time to think about these things but anyway, it is what it is. But also I guess there is something that I didn't talk about. It was about women's resistance and women's rebellion is really important things for us to consider. Not just to be thinking about narratives around resilience and thinking about how women forge their way back from places of despair and despondency. I think those are really important things so I definitely want to have that in there about women's resistance and I think that's the thing that gives me hope. That's the thing that's going to change things. I think I'm hopeful that there's a new generation and that's why I asked you about, you know, are we going to be talking to young women as well because I think young women have got a very different attitude as well. A very-, they give me hope. I'm going to do a lot more listening to them and not so much talking because I think there is a tidal movement that's happening with young people that I want to nurture and I think it's going to be-, anyway yes.

Moderator: So, Akima, thank you very much.

Akima Thomas: Okay, pleasure.