

## **Farah-Feminism**

[Start of Recorded Material 00:00:00]

Intro music.

Stephanie: [00:01:00] Welcome to Peace Paradigm Radio, a project of the Metta Center for Nonviolence with the support of KWMR Community Radio. I'm Stephanie Van Hook, Executive Director of the Metta Center. Peace Paradigm Radio explores the power of active nonviolence. Nonviolence is not passivity or inaction, it's what Gandhi called, "The greatest power at the disposal of humankind." And what Dr. King called, "Love in action." [00:01:25] Through conversations with people who are putting the principles of nonviolence into practice, we weave a complex and more complete vision of humanities potential to do good despite the negative messages from the corporate mass media. [00:01:37] From this ongoing deep exploration of nonviolence emerges week by week, a vindication of our shared human dignity, the basis upon which we are empowered to practice living our highest values and to build the beloved community. We have a great show for you today. We have, in the studio with us, Farah Al Mousawi with Code Pink. [00:01:56] She is an Iraqi activist who arrived in the U.S. in 2008 and studied political science at Dominican University. But before that, let's get to Nonviolence in the News with Michael Nagler.

Michael: [00:02:07] Everyone, this is Nonviolence in the News, where we bring you analysis and news of events that are misunderstood or ignored or, shall we say, at least overlooked by the commercial mass media that Stephanie was just referring to. This is our last edition of Nonviolence in the News for the month of May. [00:02:27] And if you don't mind, I'm going to be kind of jumping around from domestic to international and back. I'd like to point out that SB1272 here in California, the Overturn Citizens United Act, just passed the Senate on a vote of 23 to 12, that's just yesterday. [00:02:46] And I don't need to tell you that we sincerely hope that Citizens United can be overturned nationally because of the devastating effect of that infusion of big money into politics has had. [00:03:01] But we have another reason for being against here at the Metta Center, and that is because of the wrong image of the human being that it is based on, namely that if a corporation has the same rights as a human, then a human has only the same rights as a corporation. [00:03:17] So we have an extra reason, a deeper reason, if you will for being against that piece of legislation and the recent addition to it, the McCutcheon Act. We were really happy to greet this new development. I've also often thought that this is a possible win for us. [00:03:35] This is an entree point and it illustrates something that we like to do in nonviolence that I call a stealth operation that is; most people will be against it because of the infusion of money political part, but it also have this effect of ennobling the human image. [00:03:54] So we will be stealthily bringing in that very, very important change. Many of us have seen an email from Climate Hero Bill McKibbin – and good

friend of ours. He has actually written a wonderful endorsement for my book, the Nonviolence Handbook. We are going to see the biggest demonstration in the history of the climate movement that'll take place hopefully around the International Days of Peace, September 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> in New York. [00:04:26] And Bill quotes from a minister who came to one of their rallies and said, "Thank you for giving me the chance to be a person who I purport to be, a person who gives a damn." We're all going to get that chance September 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>. [00:04:44] Our friends put up a very interesting article under the general title that people are learning. They have more power than they realize and are being inspired to use it. There are massive climate change protests in the U.S. and Europe. [00:04:59] And then interestingly and importantly from our point of view here at the Metta Center, Kevin and Margaret to mention two Constructive Programme actions. "Activists are thinking longer term and taking actions on their own," they say. [00:05:15] The United Nations Conference of the Parties COP; it was a global climate conference. "Has become a sad joke and embarrassment to humanity," they said. And so they are planning COP 21 which will be held in Paris in December of 2015 – if anybody wants an excuse to go to that city. [00:05:36] And they'll be creating alternative villages called, [00:05:41]. I expect that it's a Spanish word and that's how you pronounce it, but it could be Romanian as far as I know. [00:05:48] And there are these alternative cities in France, Belgium, and Switzerland, so plans are in motion to build more of them in Spain, the south Basque country – and that's particularly interesting because it's in the Basque country that the [Mon Dragonne] Cooperatives had their origins – something we have mentioned in the past and hope to report on at greater length. [00:06:11] And I am also glad personally that we've stopped calling this devastating damage to the environment quote, "Global warming" unquote, which was a nice cozy term, especially if you live close to the Article Circle – and we're now calling it climate change or climate disruption which gets a lot more of the idea across. [00:06:34]. Again, internationally, and for a different but still constructive kind of operation, there's a Swedish peace activist we've known of for some time. His name is Dylan [Vinhagen]. He's an internationally known Swedish peace activist and educator in civil disobedience and academic advisor to the International Center on Nonviolence Conflict in Washington D.C. [00:07:03] And he has just been named the inaugural holder, the first holder of an endowed chair in the study of Nonviolence Direct Action and Civil Resistance. This will be at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. [00:07:18] I expect it's a legacy of certain woman poets who have flourished in Amherst about a century and a half ago – thinking, of course, of Emily Dickenson. This is particularly helpful to my psyche because I spent so much time and energy trying to get an endowed chair in the Peace Studies Program at Berkeley and was unsuccessful in doing so. [00:07:39] I'm really glad that there will now be an endowed chair in Nonviolence Action and Civil Disobedience. That's a big chair in the push in the area of changing the paradigm, getting us toward a peace paradigm, alerting the public that nonviolence is something that you can study. [00:07:56] I

remember two decades ago, Kenneth Boulding, the famous nonviolent theorist and economist saying that something is a subject if you can give a test in it and it has a bibliography and therefore nonviolence is a subject. And now it's going to a subject with an endowed chair. [00:08:16] Just a couple of other events nobody expected, thousands of citizens just suddenly begin filling the streets in a protest march and occupying the squares of more than 50 Spanish cities. This took place this month, May 15<sup>th</sup>. [00:08:33] Well, actually, this was May 15<sup>th</sup> a couple of years ago during the [unintelligible 00:08:37] which means, "Democracy is actually here movement." And similarly, they have a movement called [unintelligible 00:08:45] "We can." Which I expect is kind of taking off from something that President Obama has said. [00:08:53] And this is a new political party that rose out of what was left of that protest movement. So why is Michael smiling? Because, again, we're seeing that movements like Occupy, which began as protests and are short lived, can go on to lead to more permanent institutions. [00:09:15] Democracies last item here, demonstrations are being held as we speak in Washington D.C. at a famous building in that city known as the White House, and in New York City in Times Square, in Chicago, and San Francisco, and 40 other cities in 8 countries including the U.K., Australia, and Germany. [00:09:37] A full list of all of these, time, and place information is available at [witness torture.tumblr.com/post](http://witness torture.tumblr.com/post). As you can tell from their URL, the issue here is to close Guantanamo and, beyond that, to end the practice of torture in so-called civilized countries and get us back on a path to a peace paradigm. [00:10:03] So thank you very much, that was Nonviolence in the News for this week.

Stephanie: [00:10:08] Well, actually Michael, there's a lot more about Nonviolence in the News that we wanted to bring out and discuss and especially with our guest Farah, today. So I just – I'm going to bring Farah on right. Welcome to Peace Paradigm Radio.

Farah: [00:10:20] Thank you so much for having me today.

Stephanie: [00:10:22] So, okay. Let's start out with a little bit about who you are, who you're working with and then let's talk about the shootings in Santa Barbara.

Farah: [00:10:33] That's quite the jump. Okay, well, as you mentioned in the intro, I'm originally from Iraq, from Baghdad. I was born and raised in Iraq and I have been in the United States since 2008. [00:10:45] I came here on a scholarship to study at Dominican University in the lovely San Rafael in Marin County. And I wanted to study politics because, to me, to study politics in America as an Iraqi was really important because my country was invaded under the premise of bringing democracy and freedom and liberty to Iraq because it was oppressed under Saddam Hussein. [00:11:11] And as a result of that invasion, a lot of devastation has happened a lot of destruction and a lot of lives have been lost and people were scattered all around the world because of the

war. [00:11:28] To me, it hit me directly and indirectly, obviously, but mostly directly where my family and I were forced to leave the country because we received numerous death threats and because of that we weren't able to continue to live in Iraq anymore. [00:11:43] So we had to leave and we moved to Syria where I lived there for five years and I studied English Literature as my first degree and then I came across a program called the Iraqi Student Project that helped young Iraqi refugees get scholarships to come and study in the United States. [00:12:02] The first wave of students were about 11 – 12 students who got accepted in universities from California to New York and in between. And I chose to – you know, I actually signed my name next to Union School, Union College in Schenectady, New York and Dominican University in California because I wanted to be on one coast or the other. [00:12:25] I didn't want to be in the Midwest. Something told me that wouldn't be a good idea. And I'm happy that I did chose Dominican as one of the two universities I signed up next to and I'm even happier that I got accepted at Dominican University because it's been an enriching experience so far to be in an amazing school, study an amazing topic that I'm very much in love with, as well as coming across so many great people that have helped shape my experience to become a really, really incredible one so far.

Stephanie: [00:13:00] And you didn't always want to come to the United States. It seems like that must have been a difficult decision. You know, here are our people who are coming in and ruining your life, why would you want to come here?

Farah: [00:13:12] Yeah, it was definitely a big struggle. For a while, after I left Iraq, my family and I, when we left and went to Syria, I just wanted to disassociate myself from everything that has to do with America. I stopped listening to American music and stopped watching American movies. [00:13:34] I spoke English before I, you know, studied English [unintelligible 00:13:37]. I even chose not to speak English just in protest to what happened to my country. When Iraq was invaded, I was there. I was in Iraq when the war happened. I can still remember in detail what happened the night the first bomb hit Baghdad – and it wasn't far away from where my family and I were staying. [00:13:57] I could still remember the light beaming through the room and the ground shaking, you know, tilting to one side and mattress, actually, was on the floor and it slid down with it. [00:14:12] So to experience that – and then after that I, you know, went out in the streets the next day with my uncle and my sister and we were going to our schools. I was in high school at that time. My sister was in middle school. And we went to our schools to see what the school situation is like, are people going, are people attending classes, what's happening? [00:14:33] And obviously, it was in complete devastation. We saw, you know, some buildings demolished and then to see American tanks driving down the streets, American soldiers dressed in uniform with their rifles. My sister's school was next to the radio station in Baghdad and so it was immediately possessed – or obtained by the U.S. military as a station.

[00:14:58] And so I saw military, you know, men and women playing basketball in my sister's school yard. Two of them were standing outside the school and one of them tried to communicate with me in Arabic, said, "As-salamu alaykum," which is the greeting in Arabic and I didn't respond, but I remember I was furious and I was angry and I was hurt at the same time. [00:15:22] And so to have that experience, I refused anything that has to do with America or the west or, you know, music, movies, speaking, communicating whatsoever. And even though I have to study English literature, which again, that's a different long story, but, you know, it was one of the few majors I could get it into in Damascus and I reluctantly did. [00:15:48] It wasn't very much my first choice and it wasn't something I was looking forward to every day waking up to go to the school, but I had to. [00:16:00] And during that time I met an American activist who was studying Arabic in Syrian, Damascus. And I didn't want to meet her initially, but my friends insisted that we do. Long story short, after much resistance I did go and meet with her and I didn't say a word. [00:16:22] And she was trying to have a conversation and be very, very nice and she said, "You know, I heard you speak really good English. I would like to communicate with you and I heard so much about Iraq. I would love to talk more about Iraq with you," and all of that. [00:16:35] And I, you know, couldn't communicate with her. Anyway – and then I said – finally, I looked at her and I said, "You know, I don't like you people. I don't – you know, you hurt me. You invaded my country. You killed my people and I don't think I can have a conversation with you. I'm sorry." [00:16:51] And I remember, I broke down and I started crying and she started crying then. And then when I saw her crying it was shocking to me because I didn't expect that. Actually, I didn't expect any other reaction, you know, at all – or any reaction for that matter. [00:17:08] When I saw her react in an emotional way, it moved me because it kind of lit a light bulb that there is something more to this than what I think American people are and America is.

Michael: [00:17:24] That's such a powerful story. It strikes me that this how nonviolence works. I mean in other words, what happened spontaneously with you and that American activist is what we try to do in nonviolence. We try to awaken the empathic response in the other person. Very often, even in a well planned nonviolent episode, you never know what's going to make it work. [00:17:52] But I think the beautiful this is now that that's happened, you seized onto it and went with it and a lot of people would not have. I mean I can perfectly understand that response. I know another Iraqi woman said that before the American's came here, yes, things were tough under Saddam. No question about it, but we had electricity, we had water, and we had love for one another and now we have none of those things. [00:18:20] So you overcame all of that and that's the kind of thing that we watch out for in nonviolence and we try to build on and we try to convince people that no matter how debased an opponent may seem to be, there is always that other humanity in them that can be reached.

Farah: [00:18:38] And I think that's exactly – the last point that you brought up is the humanity aspect which, to me, was so obvious because of all the armor and the uniform that was presented to us. And not to mention even the war rhetoric that was going on – the war drums were beating so loud in Iraq to the point that we could not see past the devastation and destruction and the pain that came with it. [00:19:06] But once I had that humanitarian communication, you know, once we both started to cry – so it was a mutual reaction that we both had that really stripped all the pain, all the violence away. [00:19:20] And I just saw her as a human being just like me who was moved by what I said.

Stephanie: [00:19:25] Now after this you end up – you come to the United States and you're studying at Dominican and you also become a very vibrant peace activist. So talk about maybe that transition from studying English literature to some of the campaigns that you're involved in now. And you also help to create campaigns too.

Farah: [00:19:49] Yeah. I mean it wasn't an overnight transition, obviously. It took many gradual steps, obviously. And I still feel I am in transition. I still have a lot to learn in the process, but, you know, once, again, realizing that how we're all connected and we're all on the same side of the battle. [00:20:13] And especially with people that are fighting the same fight that I am fighting which is educating the world about the reality of the war and educating the world about the reality of the war and educating the world about, you know, the reality of who the Iraqi people are and what are they made of versus what is presented on the news. [00:20:34] That gave me the drive to do more work and be involved with many actions and be part of several campaigns to help demonstrate that. And, you know, through my work – I've been working with several organizations and mostly with Iraq veterans against the war. [00:20:52] And I'm currently also a member of Civilian Soldier Alliance which is a group of civilians who work closely with veterans who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan and particularly members of Iraq veterans against the war. [00:21:06] And I – my encounter with them was also another interesting story because I never thought I would be able to work with anyone who served in the military or to have conversation with one, let alone to work on peace activism with them. [00:21:20] So, to me, that was another challenge that I overcame and I'm very proud of because I got to meet amazing young men and women who are passionate the same way that I am. We've done street theater, you know, we've done actions around the Iraq war anniversary. Every year now on the war anniversary we have an event and last year we had a panel discussion where we had an Iraqi refugee doctor who shared his experience. [00:21:50] We had a soldier who served in Iraq two turns and he shared his experience. And we had an American lawyer who is suing the Bush Administration on behalf of an Iraqi refugee mother living in Jordan right now. [00:22:02] And he was talking about that case. I also work with the Chelsea Manning Campaign. And many people are shocked – like why would you do that? And I say, "Well, because Chelsea Manning, to me, she's a hero.

She revealed information about the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. She helped release the video, the collateral damage video that showed the killing of 11 innocent civilians including two members of the Reuters news agency. [00:22:30] And how would I not be, you know, part of this campaign?

Michael: [00:22:36] I know that there is a quite respectable history of nonviolence in Iraq. There was a 1948 episode and there are others. And, in fact, down into the period we're talking about, there was an organization called [unintelligible 00:22:52] which means, I believe, nonviolence.

Farah: [00:22:54] Nonviolence. Yes.

Michael: [00:22:56] And it came out of the human rights networks which is one of the places, not necessarily, the best, but it is one of the places that nonviolence comes out of. Are you are of what [unintelligible 00:23:08] was doing then and what it may or may not be doing now? And then I want to share anecdote about that.

Farah: [00:23:15] Unfortunately I don't know what they're up to right now. I haven't been reading much about their work recently. I do know one of their members recently participated in a panel discussion that was – I believe it was about a month ago – that took place in Washington D.C. along with – they were reading testimonies on the reality of the situation in Iraq today and he was reading testimonies with [Unad Muhammad] who is the founder of Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq. [00:23:53] And three members of Iraq Veterans Against the War and a member of the organization CCR – Constitutional – Center for Constitutional Rights. Sorry. That's the name. Also, in collaboration with Iraq Veterans Against the War and they are all launching a campaign to call for reparations and accountability for the veterans and Iraqi's.

Michael: [00:24:21] I know – my friend Kenneth Boulding, who I mentioned earlier, he thought that that was going to be the way that we'd eventually defeat the war system was to make it more – too expensive to carry on. [00:24:31] But the anecdote I wanted to share with you was when people were having meetings for [unintelligible 00:24:38], there was a difficulty with the [Shabab], you know, with the young man who would come out and tear down the posters. And this is from a Spanish film – a film made by a Spanish company that I saw this interview. [00:24:52] Where two guys, a Shiite and a Sunni together went out to one of these neighbors where the [Shabab] who are tearing down the posters and making it impossible for them to operate and had a meeting with these young guys. [00:25:06] And said – this is something I've very forgotten because this is really another aspect of nonviolence that compliments what you were just saying about your reconciliation with your friend. [00:25:16] They said to these young guys, "We know that you're brave enough to be violent, but are you brave enough to be

nonviolent?” And five minutes later those kids were out there helping them put up posters.

Farah: [00:25:28] Yeah. It’s definitely recognizing what our capabilities, like you said, and our limits and what we can do and how far we can go with them. I want to point out there in that story as well. I think that there’s some assumptions that can be deconstructed in it as well because these children weren’t being violent because they were violent by nature. [00:25:51] And this is, you know, all of a sudden the nonviolent group comes in and helps everybody like see their real side. They were angry about what was happening and they felt that their choice was to use the anger and to act out of it in some way. [00:26:05] And so we have to remember that acting non-violently doesn’t mean that you’re acting without anger, it’s that you’re sublimating the anger. You’re using it for the long term and we need role models and examples. [00:26:16] and every time I hear you tell that story, Michael, I always think about how important it is to have male role models for other males to see. [00:26:26] So I think that that’s even more powerful in that story. But I want to segue into the shooting in Santa Barbara. What does this have to do with militarism? And this is – I want to bring this together now. So we know that there’s been a lot of discussion on social media especially and in the New York Times even about the misogyny of the young man who shot the women out of his ignorance. [00:26:55] You know, this cultural ignorance that he has, thinking about his views about women. It was a misogynist act and we need to tie that into understanding militarism and how – what’s the relationship between misogyny and militarism. [00:27:12] So tying that to the war in Iraq, I think that we can – and we decided that we were going to talk a little bit about some misconceptions of Iraqi women that helped fuel the divides between cultures, especially United States – the way that the United States portrayed the war as going in to help Iraqi women.

Stephanie: [00:27:32] So let’s talk about that a little bit. Just some of your reactions and thoughts, first of all, about the relationship between misogyny and militarism and how it might play out or how it played out for you when you heard about the Santa Barbara shootings.

Farah: [00:27:44] Sure. I mean people may think that it’s not related at all – the whole idea of misogyny and militarism, but actually I do see a communication between both ideas between both ideologies. [00:28:02] And here’s how, the military way of thinking is about conquering, is about power, it’s about imposing, you know, their way of running things. And that’s how it has been, you know, for centuries in several militaries. [00:28:19] If you look at the culture of militarism you’ll find that there is that overpowering super macho, angry, violent way of taking things in their hands.

Stephanie: [00:28:30] That’s a really good start and I’m going to pause right here because we have to take a mid show break. So when we come back we’re talking Farah from Code Pink and many other organizations and

we are on the topic of women and militarism and nonviolence. So stay tuned.

[00:28:49] Music.

Stephanie: [00:29:39] Welcome back to Peace Paradigm Radio. I'm your host, Stephanie Van Hook, and I'm here in the studio with my co-host Michael, and our guest Farah from Code Pink and other nonviolent social justice organizations in the Bay Area. Michael, right before we went on break we were discussing misogyny and militarism and nonviolence in terms of the Santa Barbara shootings and you said you had something you wanted to add to that discussion. [00:30:05] So let's get you started.

Michael: [00:30:06] Thank you, Stephanie. I'd like to contextualize the conversation that we're going to have a little bit. I was startled by the last sentence of a newspaper article the day after the shooting which said, quite correctly, and now attention will be turned to the motives of this young man. [00:30:28] And the reason it struck me is this is what happens every time there's one of these disasters is that attention goes to the specifics of this particular crime and nothing goes to the general atmosphere which has risen the level of violence so drastically. [00:30:45] And the reason that it doesn't, the reason we're reluctant to do that is because we'd have to face some of our own responsibility in this. We start talking about mass media or other forms of violence in our society, then we can't so conveniently point to one person and say, "Oh, he went crazy. He is a misogynist." [00:31:01] You know, all of that stuff is true, but it is a partial truth and it's distracting us from a deeper truth that at some point we need to engage with. Thanks. That was my soapbox.

Stephanie: [00:31:14] Well, Michael, thank you for your soapbox. Now back to the topic.

Farah: [00:31:22] I absolutely agree. I do believe that, you know. We have several social responsibilities that we have taken on in our cultures and our societies and unknowingly that these responsibilities have developed in ways that they've become centers or sources of danger such as the example of the shooting. [00:31:48] And one of them is that, you know, unfortunately militarism is embraced, you know, whether directly or indirectly in our culture whether we think it is happening or it's not happening. It is happening and it's happening in several forms that it might not be dressed in camouflage and wearing, you know, military boots, but it could be in any other form. [00:32:12] And such forms are the way that we raise a boy versus the way we raise a girl. One person was telling me the other day that, you know, he's a single father and he has a son and a daughter and is walking in a toy store with his kids and he saw that, you know, how all these toys that are for girls are all meant to make the girl submissive and quiet and endearing and pleasing to everybody. [00:32:39] Where she makes tea and she cooks

food and all of that and takes care of a baby versus a boy's aisle, you know, it's all very militaristic G.I. Joe and, you know, battlefield gadgets and all of that – angry, violent, aggressive, methods. So maybe we need to question the culture that we live in. [00:33:03] And if we can't change the culture, then we can start with our family. How can we shape our families in ways that they don't grow up to become, you know, following such aggressive patterns. [00:33:14] But I think that we can address the culture by addressing misogyny in the culture. That if we can pinpoint something understandable such as that, I mean it's so clear in this issue that it will begin to unpack all of the other forms of injustice too while doing good for one half of humanity – maybe slightly more.

Stephanie: [00:33:38] Now go back to what you were saying about how misogyny was a part of the shooting in Santa Barbara and some of the connections to the war in Iraq and to militarism and then talk a little bit about how we have framed Iraqi women that has – in these misogynist ways that has helped to continue and perpetuate violence.

Farah: [00:34:01] So I mean, like I said earlier, while people may think that, these are two far removed topics from each other. But again, it goes back to the culture that we are teaching. Again, militarism, you know, that it's very macho manner that teaches that you can take charge of things if things don't follow the supposedly natural course. [00:34:26] And so when I – for instance, I watch the shooter's video on YouTube which is very haunting, by the way. I mean I had nightmares after watching that video, but from the way he was talking, from the way he was addressing the camera and whoever he thought he was talking to, it just seemed to me that a lot of the notions that he had about how life should be, that he's a 22 year old and he's still a virgin. [00:34:52] And that he should be, you know, having sex by now and must have a girlfriend and all of these things that all these expectations that, you know, the culture that we're in. And because of he didn't get that so he wanted to take vengeance in his own hand. [00:35:10] And so to think about, you know, where have I heard this before? You know, this sounds very familiar. And then I look at, well, let's see the media and how it's portraying, you know, what people should have versus what they already have. [00:35:27] A lot of the movies, for instance, the war movies, they're all about vengeance. Repeatedly I hear about, you know, what – addressing violent terrorists whether in the middle east, whether in Europe, whether anywhere else, you know, let's take them, you know what, out of the planet. [00:35:43] And so there is a lot of that aggressive notion. There is a lot of that vengeance sense that is, you know, present in the media, present in the news, it's present in the movies and TV, everywhere else. [00:35:58] And again, like the culture of growing up in a place where men are taught to be G.I. Joes and girls are taught to be, you know, Mary Jane's that stay at home and do good. [00:36:11] So, like for instance, with my work with veterans, you know, I've come across veterans who were told that, you know, women in Iraq are not supposed to be seen in public, they don't let their hair out and

they wear the hijab all the time and they don't communicate and they don't speak English and they don't get education, etcetera. And one of the things that I have encountered personally, not only by people who I've worked with, but, you know people in the U.S. in general, is they are shocked that I don't wear the hijab. [00:36:44] And the first thing they ask me is like, "Did you take it off when you came to America?" And I said, "No. I've never actually had to wear one to begin with, you know. This is not how I grew up." [00:36:56] Another thing is that, "Where did you get your English from?" And I say, "Well, Iraq teaches English as a second language and kids start learning English from fifth grade onwards. [00:37:06] So I mean all of these misconceptions are definitely enhanced by the media in my opinion.

Stephanie: [00:37:11] Wait, when you were talking about that soldier who said, "Salamu alaykum," to you when you didn't say anything. I wonder if that helped to reinforce some sort of racist ideas that he had. "Well, she didn't say anything back because I'm a man and they just won't talk to me."

Farah: [00:37:27] Well, I didn't actually finish the encounter because – he actually was persistent. He – when I looked at him and I didn't say anything and he probably thought I didn't hear him so he said it again, this time a little bit louder and in a way, to me, in felt like answer me, you know? And he said, "Salamu alaykum!" [00:37:47] And I – and I just stared at him, this time with more anger in me. And I - in my mind thinking, "Really, how dare you?" You know? "You come to my country. You invade it. You take over my sister's school." And that – I felt even more protective because it didn't just become an invasion of the country, it became an invasion of something I'm familiar with that has to do with the livelihood of a member of my family that is my sister. [00:38:15] So I became even more protective and more, you know, yes, aggressive, unfortunately, at that point, you know. But I looked at him and I was really, really angry and I wanted to say a thousand things back at him, but I didn't. I chose not to because I knew if I were to engage, there will be no end to it. And so I just walked away and I hope he got it from my look. I hope he got it from my body language that I was not really happy to see him there, but yeah.

Stephanie: [00:38:42] Well, he was there to help liberate you. Can you say something about that idea?

Farah: [00:38:48] Well, I can talk about how – and what Michael was saying earlier that, you know, a lot of people who were saying how this situation in Iraq was before versus how it is today. And one thing I will share is Iraqi women, before the invasion were a crucial part of the society and the government as well. [00:39:08] In fact, the Iraqi women had a union and that union helped preserve the rights of women. If a woman wanted to divorce her husband and her husband failed to meet his duties to provide for the family, she's assigned a lawyer by the union to help her divorce her husband. [00:39:29] If a single mother

wanted to find a job, they will help get her a stipend until she finds a job to help support her family and also help her children find work and education. And so that was a reality of how life was for Iraqi women before the war. Women were working. Women were part of the society that was so tight and yes, it was oppressive during that time, and yes, it wasn't the best situation ever. [00:39:59] But at least people could go to bed and sleep and not worry about what's going to happen tomorrow versus after the invasion women could not be – they can't be outside of their front doors without being escorted by a male member. And that was the reason why my family and I had to leave. [00:40:14] I didn't have any brothers. I don't have any brothers. My father passed away in '98. So it's a family of a mother and five daughters. So the option was either, you know, all of us get married and stay in Iraq or move out of the country and live the way we've always learned how to live, which is independently.

Stephanie: [00:40:33] And you have recently been doing some work between mothers in Iraq and the United States. Can you tell us a little bit about what that project is?

Farah: [00:40:42] Yes. So prior to Mother's Day and as part of the Justice for All campaign that I've been working on with Code Pink, we wanted to make connection between Iraqi mothers and American mothers and we thought, "How could we do that?" And, you know, for the Justice for All campaign we have a main figure that is [unintelligible 00:41:06] who is the single mother and daughter and who's suing the Bush administration for the war crimes committed against Iraqi people. And so we wanted to make it about mothers, about her as a mother and a refugee mother raising four or five children on her own. [00:41:23] And also about the mothers in Iraq as well, what's their story? What do they want to share? And, you know, I reached out to my mother and to her mother friends, you know, who are also mothers and daughters. And I asked, "If you have one thing to say on Mother's Day to American mothers, what would that thing be?" [00:41:39] And I got several messages from Iraqi mothers. They're beautiful heartbreaking a lot of times – I personally struggled translating through some of them because as I was translating I was crying as well. [00:41:55] And then we got responses from not only American mothers, but we got responses from American sons, American daughters, American fathers, and they're equally as beautiful and powerful.

Stephanie: [00:42:07] Did you have some that you might be able to share with our listeners today?

Farah: [00:42:11] Absolutely. I can share one – this is actually from my sister. – she wrote it, and she's a mother of four. And she says, "Every day I send my children off to school with fear and sometimes I can't find a safe place for us to rest or enjoy a break. If my husband takes too long to return home, we become so worried that we drop everything until he arrives home safe. [00:42:34] Safety has become a wish a we long for

and terrorism lies everywhere.” Another mother writes, “My sister, American mother, I say sister because we are sisters in humanity and we both live through hard times imposed on us by a government under many false perceptions to justify its invasion of my country. [00:42:58] What we live through as mothers during and after this invasion took the lives of hundreds of thousands of our children and left the door wide open for all sorts of evil. It caused problems that we never expected such as sectarianism, corruption, kidnappings, and targeted killings of innocent people. [00:43:16] We pray to God that you don’t have to go through such pain and we hope that you and history will never forget what your government did to our country for no reason but to destroy and exploit its resources.

Michael: [00:43:28] I just, again, wanted to point out – I hope I don’t like a broken record here, but I wanted to point out that that’s a very good – very useful historically nonviolent instinct is to go to women in general and mothers in particular because there’s so many episodes in the world of nonviolence where a mother’s love has overridden enormous violence and simply prevail. [00:43:52] I mean just one sort of humorous note, I remember an episode in Belfast during the troubles there where this young man who’s being accosted by – oh, I don’t know which side he was on and which side was the other – but he was surrounded by people who were getting ready to kill him. [00:44:06] He was not far from his home. His mother rushed out and said, “Murphy, what are you doing out there without a coat? Now come on in.” And she just pulled him out of the whole situation and all these tough gun men were not able to do anything. [00:44:21] And one thinks of the mothers of the Russian soldiers who actually went into military camps and took their sons out. So there is a powerful resource there that we, in nonviolence have got to – again, take these instinctive reactions, which you’re describing, and build on them, turn them into institutions that we can really rely on.

Stephanie: [00:44:46] And so did – how did the American mothers react? Did you get sad letters back from them? Did anybody respond? What was the results?

Farah: [00:44:55] You know, I was pretty astonished by the amount of replies that we got because we received probably tens of hundreds of comments from people who responded with, you know, like I said, equally moving testimonies. [00:45:15] And I can share some of them if you want.

Stephanie: [00:45:18] That’d be wonderful.

Farah: [00:45:20] This is one of my favourites because it’s not coming from a mother, it’s coming from a father who felt compelled to share with the Iraqi mothers what we felt. And he said, “As a father of two, I cannot begin to understand the pain of your great losses as a result of a terrible war.” [00:45:41] Another – another participant said, “You are still in

our thoughts and prayers. We continue our peace vigil every month hoping all governments will make peace their priority. Another member of Veterans for Peace, actually, he wrote, “I’m a life member of Veterans for Peace and today here Prescott, Arizona there will be a group of us gathering to honour all mothers on planet earth and to put a stop to the insane act of war. [00:46:11] My deep apologies to the people of Iraq and all other countries and all the American – sorry. All other countries that the American war machine continues to occupy and attack. I mean I could go on reading, you know, all of this. But people can actually find these letters online if they could – if they go online and they write, “Mother to mother. Iraqi mother letters, Code Pink,” they will find it online and it’s readily available for them to read.

Michael: [00:46:42] That’s really nice stuff, Farah. I wonder if you were aware, I was not until recently that Mother’s day actually began as an anti-war movement.

Farah: [00:46:52] That I actually learned recently and which, to me, is beautiful because if we could all change these, you know, events to become ways to advocate for more peace and more anti violence.

Michael: [00:47:05] Well, as a male wannabe feminist, I take comfort in this because sometimes, as you’re more aware of than I am, in First Wave feminism, especially, there was an overreaction to the stereotyping of men and women like at the toy store episodes that you described. [00:47:26] And there was an attempt to override the differences and pretend that women are the same as men, men are the same as women which, of course, on the level of the soul, we’re all absolutely identical, but there’s such a precious capacity within women which is specific to them as women – not that men can’t have it and can’t resonate with it, but it’s just simply because of the clobbering that we’ve received by our culture. [00:47:52] It’s a little harder for us to reach it. And so I’m very glad that along with the deconstruction of the stereotypes, there is now an attempt to preserve what is specifically valuable. And, of course, Gandhi was all for this. He felt, toward the end, that nonviolence was more of a women’s issue.

Farah: [00:48:14] Absolutely. And I think, you know, going back to the culture and how we are raised and what we are told, you know, as women versus what we’re told if we were men. And unfortunately, in my opinion, I think, you know, I think it’s for the benefit of the male dominant society that men take charge because it is a male dominant society. [00:48:36] If they enable women to take charge – and this is something, actually, I’ve repeatedly heard from women from the Middle East and they constantly tell me the same thing, that if they find out that women are capable of taking charge, then that is a threat to their power and that is a threat to their authority and they can’t conceive the reality of being stripped from their power and their authority, you know. [00:49:01] And we were discussing earlier of how even women in a work force that is full of men, how they dress and behave and they

have to behave and dress manlike as much as possible because to them, that's how they can fit and blend into that community, to that little boy's club. [00:49:18] Otherwise they can't make it anywhere else and it's very much apparent in political cities, in powerful – like Wall Street, you find women dressed as men. In D.C. you find women dressed as men.

Stephanie: [00:49:31] And not in the good way either.

Farah: [00:49:34] Sometimes they even, you know, behave like men.

Michael: [00:49:35] Not with taste.

Farah: [00:49:37] No, unfortunately, but to them, you know – and there are a lot of ambitious women just as they're a lot of ambitious men. It just – the whole – they made – they made it so difficult for women to succeed in these areas that you have to become like them. You have to be, you know, vulgar and violent and vicious at the same time. I use three words starting V, but, you know. [00:50:03] But you have to behave that way in order to break through that glass ceiling.

Stephanie: [00:50:08] You know, recently with the social networking sort of wars that they call them – like the Twitter wars and so forth – in terms of trying to interpret the misogyny behind the act of the shooter in Santa Barbara I came across a quote from Virginia Wolff and I wish I could say which book it came from. Maybe Michael has read it. It's, "Nobody minds if a women thinks as long as she's thinking about a man."

Michael: [00:50:38] That might be from – might be from Three Guineas.

Stephanie: [00:50:41] Or thinking like one and what we have to look at is, as you said at the very beginning, what are the values of the society that we're living in? What are the values? And so if we're just replacing men with women and we're keeping the value systems exactly the same, then we're not doing the work. [00:50:59] But as interpreting what Michael said in terms of what we call unity and diversity, or what I like to call unity and authenticity, you know, it's more than diversity. It's authenticity. It's everybody trying to be their most natural self as possible and celebrating that. [00:51:15] There is – in terms of male and female roles in society and so forth, that there is some power there that we can draw from when we're doing our nonviolence work.

Michael: [00:51:27] Years back when I was trying to create the Peace and Conflict Studies Program at Berkeley, which did succeed, I was a having conversation with a woman in provost who had just become an assistant provost who was very, very helpful. She came from the Nutritional Science Department. [00:51:43] And we were discussing all of this. At that time I still had a little bit to learn. Of course, I'm complete now and fulfilled, but I remember her quietly saying to me in the middle of a conversation, "Women are just as diverse as men."

[00:51:56] And I said, “Duh.” That never occurred to me, but that’s part of the misogyny is the stereotyping and the failure to recognize and benefit from the diversity among women-kind. I wonder, as we’re quickly going off the air here, if I might be allowed to give a self-serving PSA – a public service announcement. [00:52:19] I just wanted to mention to listeners that this Sunday I’ll be giving a TedX talk down in Fremont. It’s called, “Daring to Explore the World Within. A Tale of Two Paradigms.” And it will be in the usual channels, YouTube, and TedX. [00:52:36] If it’s a disaster I would ask you please not to watch it, but I think there’ll be some good nuggets in it.

Stephanie: [00:52:41] And what is that? How can you relate that to the topic of militarism and – go ahead. Tell us, give us a little preview – a one minute preview.

Michael: [00:52:51] What I’m going to talk about is the new story as values that we desperately need. And there and there are two things that most people working in this field I don’t think have quite reckoned with. One is that the kernel of the new story has to be a new image of the human being. [00:53:09] Of course, when we say new, it’s actually a perennial story. It’s been around for thousands of years, but new to us. So that’ll be one of my points. That until and unless we focus our efforts on the human being and what we are, we won’t have the complete story – this was the heart of the story. [00:53:26] And the other thing is that the minute you say that, you realize that nonviolence is the key to the whole thing because nonviolence is absolutely at the core of human nature. It’s what differentiates us and designates our eventual goal in the evolutionary process. [00:53:44] And also, Arnold Toynbee, the great British historian once said, “Apathy can only be overcome by enthusiasm.” And to rouse enthusiasm can only be done by two things, an idea that takes the imagination by storm, and a concrete, intelligible plan for putting that idea into practice. [00:54:06] I’m going to say that the new story is an idea that takes the imagination by storm and nonviolence is the concrete way that can put it into practice.

Farah: [00:54:16] That’s beautiful.

Stephanie: [00:54:17] Farah, I’ll give you the last word today. So what are some of the concrete ways that we can put our idealism into practice?

Farah: [00:54:26] I have always been a fan of direct communication and conversation. If I didn’t have a conversation with that young woman activist in Syria, I don’t think I would be here today. I don’t think I would be able to do all the work that I’ve been doing so far and continue to do at least for the foreseeable future. [00:54:47] And I encourage everyone to get out of the comfort zone and have a conversation with somebody that you never expected to talk to. You know, see what is troubling you about them and then take it from there.

Stephanie: [00:55:02] Thank you very much, Farah Al Mousawi and Michael Nagler, my co-host, and to everybody who is listening today. May you take care of one another until the next time.

Farah: [00:55:12] Thank you.

[End of recorded material 00:55:15]