**Interview with Bernadette Daou**

**2013**

**TAPE 1**

**Bernadette Daou:** I was born during the war in 1979, and I was born to a family that used to live in the winter in Beirut and all the year in the mountain, the Shouf area… From a Christian family. In 1983, I was like 4 years. I think we were displaced from our… from Shouf. And at this time I entered the school also, and we live in Beirut since then. In Christian Eastern Beirut, with my family who is not politicized, but we used to discuss politics. I used to discuss politics with my father and following the news, and reading the newspapers. But basically he was against all political parties, and I was also in the beginning of my activism life if you will. I was independent in the first year or second year of university… so I was in the Lebanese university, I was studying law. And it’s the Christian area, also it’s a special section of the Lebanese university. And also I started to read in the Leftist newspapers like Al-Safir. Especially the page of the youth. And I used to read for certain writers like Sahar Mandour and Emelia Abu-Jawdeh. There was also a liberal movement by the Aouniyyeh who were allied in this time to some independent Leftist groups who were opposing the Syrian hegemony, etc. but I started to be active in my university with my cousins. We were like an independent group, but we had a disagreement in my second year because of (inaudible 0:03:08:2) and the elections with Lebanese forces which I used to hate from my childhood and they were like militia part of the terror, and during the war, there is this perception that these militias are protecting the Christians but they were not. They were hostile toward our society. So I used to hate them from when I was young, and I used to hate Michael Aoun also because he left his movement and he went to France. So I couldn’t find myself in the Christian parties. So I left the group, and in the same year, there were… elections, general elections, parliamentary in the year 2000, and I heard of a campaign in the newspapers and Sout Al-Sha’ab, I used to listen to Sout Al-Sha’ab also, about a campaign for lowering the voting age. And I was about to become 21 and I was angry why I cannot vote, and I didn’t want to vote but I just have the right, I consider myself that I have the right to say what I think. So, I contacted the campaign through the radio, and I took an appointment and went there to the Union of Lebanese Democratic Youth. So it’s the youth organization of the Communist party. But it is always introduced as an independent organization but it is usually the recruitment base of the Communist party for the youth. And I worked in the campaign, and also I felt that I was finding what I was looking for in politics, and I considered the Left, even on the political level, they were pro… in the civil war, they were against me, and this was something that I was breaking, something I learned from my parents that I wasn’t convinced that it is like this. I had… how do I say it? Curiosity to know, like the first time I went to Western Beirut, I was walking and I was 18. I was talking to myself and saying “Okay, I am in Western Beirut and nobody is hurting me”. Yeah it’s okay, you can live here. So, I started to know these people who I looked very… they were like… in my mind, they were like people who are liberated especially on the social level, because I am a woman and I come from this society, Christian conservative society where I used to fight with my father if I wanted to go out in the night. So I saw that in my mind and through my readings also, that this is the Utopia, people are liberated here and I can trust them. And I started to be active in the campaign. Actually, two things happened with me and my activism was (inaudible 0:07:32:5) on the personal level, I was shocked, not shocked, but disappointed from the men behavior toward women, and on the personal level, someone from the leadership was… I had a crush on, but who was using me sexually and in the same time, he was in love with someone else and I didn’t know. So I thought that these people because they are liberated, they don’t act like the society tells them, if they act on their feelings, their feelings I thought that they are like me, you know. And this was on the personal level, and not also my personal experience. Also in the center when I used to go. There was also one girl who was making the coffee all the time and answering the phone. There were also older men who were controlling… because all of us were used, but not the young men who were managing this, it was older men, and they are also members of the party and they were the leaders of this organization. On the political level, I… wanted to be active on where I was, because I was in the university in section 2 in the East of Beirut where the Left is not existent anymore, etc. so we wanted to make a Leftist group in the university, and the leadership of the UJDL said no. they refused and said this is not the way that we want to enter the Eastern Beirut. You can make something secular or democratic, but don’t say Leftist. We started to fight on this, and also they wanted to spy, I mean they wanted me to bring the statement of the other Christian parties to give them to them. I said “I’m sorry, I don’t do this work, this is intelligence work, so send your boys and they can bring you…” I remember one afternoon, I was fighting with the responsible of the Beirut Bureau. And then I decided to quit. And also I started to hear about opposition in the Communist party which were called “Communist Students”. This group was established one year before 2000. It was the second “Intifada” where I was still in the UJDL. A year after, I was introduced to the group, and in the same time I was volunteering for the WTO parallel or counter meeting was in Beirut. It was in 2001 in Doha. They were volunteering for ANND, for Arab NGO Network for Development, and I started to attend meetings or so… In this period, I stayed until the formation of the Democratic Left, which I didn’t… enter this process because, I will tell you now why. So during this… from 2001 till 2004, we had two main events that we organized; sit-ins and demonstrations. The first war was in 2002. It was the Jenin massacre and the blockage on Ramallah. We organized a permanent sit-in for one month and a half. Different independent Leftist groups from AUB or ALU or Communist Students, and also there were people from the Communist party participating but not mainly in the event. And we organized many demonstrations and also the sit-in. this sit-in was a success because it was recruiting people and making noise about the issue, and also the people from the Eastern side which were the Aouniyyeh were also visiting. Some of them because… Communist Students used to work also on the issue of public freedoms and private freedoms. So we used to work with the Christian parties. More with the Aouniyyeh because they were more secular for us. And they used to participate in those events also but not, you know, they send representatives… and in this sit-in, the Al-Yasari magazine was established. I remember that I wrote one article for Al-Yasari, but discussions were very… I used to attend the meetings and the discussions were very interesting. Al-Yasari was mainly… the work was done mainly by independent Leftists, and some people… I was with two comrades from Communist Students who used to also attend the meetings and write sometimes to the magazine. At this time we started to have the discussions about, war, about globalization, about Feminism, women issues, gender issues. These discussions took place in this group for me for the first time, because in other political groups like Communist Students or UJDL, we used to comment or discuss the mainstream political news that… you know those Opposition and Advocacy, you know the mainstream politics or issues related to oppressing some demonstrations or some political parties especially the ones against the Syrian parties. But we didn’t really discuss on the intellectual level what is our intellectual identity as Communist students, so for me now when I look at it back, I think it was a liberal version from ex-Communists that are fed up of everything, all the jargon of the Communists. I think they were making end from Elias Atallah and people who were inside the Communist party and were part of the leadership sometimes, and they were participating in the decisions. So it was like a reaction, the identity wasn’t clear, but it was taking this middle… Left, how do you say it? The central Left?

**Nicola Pratt:** Yeah. Moderate Left?

**BD:** Yeah. Al-Yasari was more…

**NP:** Left of Centre.

**BD:** Yeah, Left of Centre. Al-Yasari, the people inside especially the independent were more anarchist individuals, or revolutionary socialist, but they were not organized still, but the discussion tackled deeper issues… the second event was… Al-Yasari was still, people from different groups were writing in it, and in 2003, we had an anti-war campaign. The campaign here was named “No war, No Dictatorship” because these groups of Left that were involved against Imperialism and globalization, but in the same time against dictatorship, against the Syrian hegemony, against riot. So, the discussion produced that our campaign should be opposing both, the war and Saddam. And this was a… it was a big and hard discussion in the classic Left, and we succeeded to split from the big meetings and to organize our meetings, and we organized the first demonstration, it was an international call I think on the 15th of February, like the 15th of every month until the raid for stayed. So this… we actually succeeded to recruit all people on the Left or secular people that are not necessarily affiliated to or are still… or they oppose the classical Left. So it was mainly young groups, young people from universities and independent political groups. And also in this demonstration, I think this one, it was the first time when the rainbow flag is raised in a demonstration in Beirut. Not everybody understood what it was about. It was a group who later formed or established “Hilm”. Some of them were part of the discussions and of the campaign. And this issue which was not… I mean, for me it is not a decision of the campaign if they let people hold the flag or not, but after it, because of the success of the first demonstration, and also the… some people were criticizing our campaign until it succeeded with this number of participants, so they started to want to take the lead. The first question was the criticism about the rainbow flag and that was the first time that we discussed things related to sexuality or sexual freedoms in Communist Students. The second thing, the leaders of the opposition wanted to be in the front of the campaign and of the second demonstration. So we decided that we will make a women front in the beginning of the demonstration. So all the men, young or old, will have to… this was a way to resist this trying to hegemonize the movement especially from old men, they want to lead this movement as an opposition to the Communist party. That was their purpose… so, after that, the discussion on splitting from the Communist party… the opposition wanted to split from the Communist party. It was thinking, it was not a decision… it was not assumed but after 2004, it was really… and in the same time, on the level of the groups, we were trying to make the Leftist platform, which was a failure because the idea was a Leftist platform for different Leftist currents, and questions about the currents and the intellectual identity, ideological identity, questions about organization, the place of groups and individuals in the same time. But it didn’t produce… the discussions were really intense and the groups were “if I have my group, why would I want to make a new group?”, and in the same time, the discussion about the whole opposition in the Communist party. So why do I want to make this? It was like two projects of making this platform of Leftists. So the other idea was the Democratic Left, but it was an idea that is close to the idea of the Leftist platform, but with other people; people that are in the opposition of the Communist party from different regions and… but the discussions started to take place in Beirut were… me and some of my friends participated in some of the meetings in the beginning, but I think there was the event of the liberation of… what’s his name? One of the Communist detainees in Israeli prisons, Yassin, I forgot his small name.

**NP:** (inaudible 0:26:21:6)

**BD:** so on this event, the Democratic Left wanted to announce it themselves, and they decided that which are the leadership, they call it the pairing committee I think, and they decide about the politics. They criticize the resistance. They commented on this event, you know it was a statement which we were asked to write. We were not asked to discuss nor the name of the organization, nothing. So, part of us objected on this statement, but they didn’t… so we decided to split, to stop the routines. So, at that time some of the people decided to make a Leftist group… that has an ideological identity and a certain organization that will work independently, and that was called before, in the beginning, the Revolutionary Socialists Assembly; the gathering of revolutionary socialists. And then a small group (inaudible 0:28:09:4) to our group and they asked to change the name. The name became the Leftist Assembly for Change, which also on a later stage, I think in 2010 after I quit, they merged with another group and they are now the Socialist Forum, “Muntada”.

**NP:** Forum.

**BD:** Forum, yes… so this group in the beginning of the foundation and the discussion, the assassination of Hariri took place. So all the movement, all the buildup, the momentum from 2002, 2003, and 2004 was hijacked by the formation of the Democratic Left where all the independent Leftist groups became members, and they allied to the 14th of March in this period. So we were taking distance from them and from the Communist party also… In 2005, the main work we were doing was internal or writing publications or commenting by statements, but there were no more groups that we can work with on the ground, because all the country was also divided, and we took distance from some NGOs who were also active with the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections. Mainly, all the NGOs at this time were coming close to the government except for Hilm I think, because Hilm, even with the 14th of March, they haven’t

TAPE 2

**Bernadette Daou:** (inaudible 0:00:01:2) the registration number. I think they still until now. So… one of the main events was the 2006 war when I was working with this group, the Leftist Assembly for Change. In the preparation, it was the 12th of July, we were preparing for a sit-in in solidarity with Gaza, and in the same time, we started to be in contact with the student groups and the universities, and there were also some international activists who were present in this time. So what happened is when… the first day of the sit-in was the first day of the war, and directly the sit-in decided to act on what’s happening, and the refugees started to flow to Beirut. So the decision was taken that we want to be part of the civil resistance in this warm because the country was politically divided, and for us, we saw that civil resistance is crucial in this time to support resistance of the military efforts that the society will not be divided, that the people who are taking refuge in Beirut will not be… punished for what Hezbollah is doing. And we established “Samedoun”. It was the first response campaign directly in the street, and I started to work… we established different units. We were working… I worked in the media unit, and… we were coordinating the relation with the media to advertise about what we need. That was not paid, it was volunteered. And some of the televisions like Al-Jadeed television had important work in this period and helped us to put our announcement that we want volunteers or donations, etc… I don’t (inaudible 0:03:43:1) if you want to direct me with questions because I don’t know if I’m answering what you really want. Is there a specific…

**Nicola Pratt:** No, I’m very interested in what you’re telling me. I mean I would like to follow up with some questions, but if you wanted to continue telling me about 2006 until now, and then I can go back and ask you some follow-up questions. Is that okay?

**BD:** Okay, yes. So after the 2006 war. For me personally… after the war, there were the conference in Beirut in solidarity with the resistance, and we were supposed to be coordinating this conference, but other people who are close to the classical Left and of course to Hezbollah took over the coordination. And Samedoun was not present to talk about their experience in this conference. The main star was Hezbollah and the discussion was mainly about the role of Hezbollah. But the real, if you want… what really happened especially during the first 33 days, during the war, the light was not shed on this part of the resistance. And we were discussing also our support to the resistance in Samedoun, that we have a critical side. We are supporting the resistance but we have a critical position from Hezbollah, especially in the social level, especially on the Lebanese political level, economical, etc. so we didn’t consider Hezbollah that was… how do I say it? It was a liberating movement but for us, a liberating movement should be on all levels like resistance to the war, to Imperialism, to occupation, and also to neoliberalism, on the economical and social level also. So at this time, I started to question my position in the group and I felt that our criticism to Hezbollah was not really formulated and was not clear. So the work after the 2006 war… the second year, there was Nahr Al-Bared war and there were no campaigns. We tried to organize a campaign but we were not… the experience of Samedoun was a little bit negative in the end after the war, after the humanitarian work and all the budgeting was negative. How the campaign ended was negative for such an activist, and I think they lost a certain trust in our group. And also, I think there were… I think it was also political because the majority of the activists wanted to do humanitarian work without any political agenda, but we… and in the same time, there were like very… sectarian and racist campaign against Palestinians in general because this is the Lebanese army. So no one wanted to do politics in this time where it was the most needed. And also the attacks from 2005 on the Syrian workers and the attacks on the Palestinians in general during the Nahr Al-Bared war were not taken politically except for our small group. We were around 15 in the biggest meeting. So, also after the Nahr Al-Bared war, the divisions continued and was more flagrant in the country. And also when civil conflict is bigger, you feel like you’re smaller also, more small, you know? You don’t exist, you can’t even go to Hamra to see your comrades or meet them. So the seventh of May took place, 2008 when the government took a decision to dismantle the communication network of Hezbollah, and Hezbollah responded by (inaudible 0:10:29:0) war in Beirut, so that was the limit point for me. I can’t be supporting this party any more. I can’t believe in their resistant work anymore because they cannot be resisting and exaggerating the civil conflict inside, and using the arms against other civilians. And, so the problems inside the group, I started to face these problems at this time, and so my political questioning was becoming more… making me more far from the group until I resigned in 2010 I think, or the beginning of… no, 2010. Because the political differences were not manageable and… as a woman, when I was… the discussion became more difficult for me because it became really violent sometimes, like shouting and oppressing in the meeting. So I couldn’t stay and each time I participate in a meeting, there is a clash, and I couldn’t stay. I asked myself if I want to stay and don’t express my opinions, because I don’t want to every time make a dispute in the meeting, and we were a minority, we were three members who agreed on certain points against the biggest number of the group. In the group were 3 remaining 3 members of the establishing members. We were 2 men and 1 woman. And we had a strong friendship relationship also. So it was like… I felt like I’m facing 2 men, and also that I don’t have a voice, that I can’t continue in this type of meetings. So I decided to quit, but in the same time, I worked also hard on keeping my friendship with them. It wasn’t obvious and it was very difficult because we were friends since ten years, and every time we wanted to do something we opened the discussion. They wanted me back and we start to dispute also. So, after that, I decided not to be involved in organized work. In the same time, I registered back in the university to do my master’s, and I said that I wanted to invest my time in something related to my questions. Part of it was to answer my questionings and I felt like I want to build my opinion on my own. So… after this, I practically, maybe I participated in some demonstrations, but really rarely, until the revolution started, and I was participating in all the demonstrations in front of embassies in support and solidarity with Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. So in the same time, after one of the sit-ins in solidarity with the Egyptians, some groups, between them the group that I was member in who became the Socialist Forum, organized a meeting to gather activists to work on toppling the Lebanese sectarian regime. I didn’t participate from the first meeting. I went to the second meeting because I heard that there were like 200 activists that we don’t know in the meeting, so I was very excited to know who those people are. So I saw that there is really mobilization. I went to the meetings and mainly the people who are secular… the Democratic Left was not existing anymore. They’re not active anymore, I don’t know if there are members still. They were the Communist party. There were the national movement and the SSMP. I mean the classical Left and nationalists were present in this campaign, whom I, a long time ago, I didn’t want to work with, you now? But I was a member, I wasn’t organized, I was an individual but I participated in the preparation for 3 demonstrations. But the campaign was violent. It was the first campaign for me that… you attend the meeting for 6 hours and you don’t produce anything, and during this meeting, you have the chance to speak one time, and many people will speak in the same time and you have to scream sometimes to… and it was flooded also after the success of the first demonstration, this is a classical thing. After the success of a demonstration and a campaign, those old men with grey hair want to take over. So I withdrew and started to participate on an individual level with all the solidarities and the Syrian revolution also started. And this was also a point that divided I think not only the Left and the Right but everywhere. In Lebanon it was a violent division where many demonstrations and sit-ins with the Syrian revolution is countered by a big manifestation from Al- Ba’ath and the nationalists, and the army in the middle. It was the first time in my life that I felt that the Lebanese army is protecting me. Until some of the campaigners were attacked in front of the Syrian embassy. After that, the campaign organized… there were no more campaigns after it, because organizing the events is difficult and also some of the 14th of March like Sanyoura or Fatfat participated in the demonstration or the sit-in. and it was violent to be there to just stand in front of the embassy. You cannot arrive to the Syrian embassy. So I stopped really to participate in meetings, and also lately from 2011, the independent activists or independent Leftist groups were not active, they were gradually less active until there is nothing being done lately on the Syrian revolution level. And also there are other campaigns which Nasaweyya organized on the parliamentarian elections and I wasn’t convinced. I… took a distance from organized work, and I can’t see, maybe I’m still politically close to the Socialist Forum. All the point that we were fighting on changed now, but after the Syrian revolution, but I see them close, but I see also that the work being involved and organized in political groups is oppressing in a way because… now I think the Forum is a little bit different from before because you have the feeling that there is a lot of things that you want to change, and you are incapable of doing anything, and it takes from your energy and takes from your time. But I don’t believe that in our actual… maybe the only… how do I say it? The only thing that a political group can make now is to take a distance from the political work and to think about all… especially after the Syrian revolution, we feel that there is a history of nationalist thought and Communist or Leftist thought that is being… that is not relevant anymore, that is also producing… some of the groups are supporting dictatorships. So I think we need in this time to think about all the history of our movement, because I think we are in a place that… also now in this period of time, also we don’t have a government. We have civil war in Tripoli. We had sometimes in Beirut, in the Beqaa, so also we are in imminent conflict with Israel all the time, and Hezbollah is also participating and supporting a dictatorship, so all these questions are more clear now, they took a clear state or a clear shape, but the work that is needed now is to review, and I think also it’s more intellectual level and also on living the revolutions and the questions that the revolutions are opening, not only about the Left or the more liberal parties like against the Islamists or also to understand what are the Islamists, what is political Islam. We were in a certain time opposing the war on terror and Islam phobia, etc. but we discovered that our discourse or non-sectarian or secular discourse has a lot of Islam phobia from our region. So all of this… al also the question of women; our bodies, our place in society, I think all of these questions are being… are now. I’m not sure if I want to be part in a group or participate in discussions, but I… this is it.

**NP:** Are you writing about these issues that you’re looking yourself to try and create (inaudible 0:26:33:2) thinking?

**BD:** I didn’t have the time because in 2011, I was in my second year of master’s and I had a lot of studies, and I work and study, so now I quit my job to finish, but I think after it, I am interested in reading also more, especially about… if you want, political Islam (inaudible 0:27:08:9) I know nothing in this area and the Islamic philosophy, but also I am interested in social movements in general too. Because of my experience and because of what’s happening in the revolutions. Because there is an impact, and historically there was always an impact, but there is an impact on the situation in Lebanon, and we should… I am thinking that my way of participation would be to maybe write about these issues, about my experience, about our movement now, etc.

**NP:** Can I ask you some follow-up questions? Some of them are for clarification. The sit-ins that were organized during the second Intifada, where were these held?

**BD:** Where? In Beirut mainly, in the Martyrs’ square. So the main sit-in I was talking about in 2002 in Beirut was a point that the demonstrations will go to all the embassies in Beirut. And all the activists were either students or NGO workers who work in Beirut and the suburbs mainly.

**NP:** But the sit-ins were in Martyrs’ square?

**BD:** Yeah

**NP:** Okay, not in universities?

**BD:** No.

**NP:** Okay. Al- Yasari, it was a magazine or a newspaper?

**BD:** Magazine.

**NP:** Magazine.

**BD:** It’s not online. You can’t see it anymore.

**NP:** Okay. It was only published in hard copy?

**BD:** Yes. Sonya was part of it. I don’t know if she has some copies. I don’t know.

**NP:** I can ask her. At the time you don’t think that maybe this will become a historical article to save it.

**BD:** Yeah.

**NP:** And it was published monthly or quarterly…

**BD:** I forgot. It was meant to be… I think… I forgot, I mean monthly or less. No, I’m not sure, maybe monthly, let’s say monthly.

**NP:** Okay, approximately monthly. It wasn’t a daily.

**BD:** No. it does mainly analytical articles or small articles about the events that we are doing and campaigns we are participating in, and also about

TAPE 3

**Bernadette Daou:** general issues, intellectual, political.

**Nicoal Pratt:** Okay. And you were saying as a woman, you felt that there was discrimination within the Lebanese Communist party. Did you feel more equal in the Communist Students and the other Leftist groups that you participated in after that?

**BD:** Actually, in the opposition, we didn’t discuss social issues and issues related to women. It was not a topic of discussion. And yeah, I felt the same discrimination on the political level and on the personal level. It’s not those liberated people, no. in the other group, the third group, the Leftist Assembly for Change, we had the Feminist agenda and we used to discuss issues related to gender, to liberation, to sexual liberation, to equality, to (inaudible 0:01:35:2) movement. We used to discuss these issues, and the discrimination was felt a little bit less, but it would appear when there is a clash, and when there is a different opinion, the oppression would begin, misogynist in a way that you are oppressed in a way… I am used to fight and to scream if I want to express my opinion. So in this way, when there is a difference in opinions, it was felt more. But not on the intellectual level or on the discussion level, but maybe on the practice level, the structural level I think. It appeared.

**NP:** By structural level, you mean in terms of who took decisions?

**BD:** Who had the biggest weight in the decisions. So you know… okay, we had a not very rigid organization, but sometimes it was rigid, it was really formed like there is a political bureau and there is the general assembly, but sometimes we used to work as units. But in the discussions, people had more intellectual weight, had more maybe readings and more eloquent ways to say it or take more time to say it. You can feel it in this. And those who have more political weight were (inaudible 0:03:47:0) my friends, and sometimes, the real time I felt it, there was a visit by Ahmadi Nejad, and we wanted to make a fight in the group, because I knew that this is a fighting issue. It’s not…

**NP:** Who is he?

**BD:** Ahmadi Nejad, the ex-president of Iran was visiting Beirut.

**NP:** Oh, Ahmadi Nejad, sorry. Of course, Ahmadi Nejad.

**BD:** So, Hiba and I, Hiba was my comrade and friend, we proposed to organize a sit-in in front of the Iranian embassy. So we had the first fight on the mailing list, so we decided “why are you fighting? Let’s discuss it in a meeting”. So we went to the meeting and it was mainly Hiba and I discussing for the sit-in and another member, a man, and 2 other men, the main activists were against it, and it was a violent discussion. In the end, we decided to vote. It was the first time we vote on anything. So there were people in the meeting who did not express anything, did not have any intervention and they voted against us. It was really the first time I can feel it and I can see it in front of me, because they have this weight in the group, political weight in the group…

**NP:** Do you think about forming a women only organization? Have you ever thought about being in an organization that is only for women?

**BD:** Maybe sometimes I have a need on certain levels to be part of a women’s only organization. Those could be showing personal experiences and personal support. But for me, and this is political, but if I want to be active on a public level politically, I prefer, not prefer but I believe there is a partnership between women and men and they should be acting in the public together in politics. Until now, also in the women only groups, there is this patriarchal structures also. The women are reproducing the structures in their own groups. Maybe on a class level discrimination. If you have learned in a private university and come from a certain class, you will have advantages on other people and it is reproduced inside the organization. So I think for me the need… I have a need to be in women only groups on things related only to women that men don’t live or experience. Maybe also I am interested to know about personal experiences of men and about their gender and how they are oppressed or not, if they see this or not. I believe that this is political because you are a person that needs… you need this, how do I say it? Support? And I think it is an empowerment factor, to be also in an activist society or in a militant society where it is not easy to be a woman also, to participate and discuss, to make presentations, all of these… but I believe that Feminist issues are related to other issues. I cannot be a woman only; I am a woman from a lower middle class maybe, from this Christian area of Beirut, from a conservative society, you know? This all defines me as a person, and I want to fight all of these in the same time, in the same importance I mean, not in the same time maybe. I think that men and women like me should be partners in this fight and struggle.

**NP:** Can I ask whether the Leftist Assembly…

**BD:** For Change.

**NP:** For Change. Is it affiliated with any international Leftist movements?

**BD:** I think they participate in the international Socialist Tendency, the IST, and they have a good relationship with the SWP in Britain. Also in the region, they are in a network formed by revolutionists in Syria, in Egypt, in Tunisia, in Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan. So I think also on the level of the region, they are… Turkey also, people from Turkey. They are coordinating, yeah.

**NP:** I just forgot the question I was going to ask you… Okay, I’ve forgotten it, sorry. It might come back to me later. Have you ever… from the beginning why did you think it was important to be part of a political organization? Because the era that you were talking about in the 90’s, we mentioned this before when we started the interview, that was the emergence of NGOs. Some people I’ve spoken to of your age or less, they began and got involved with the Lebanese association of democratic elections or some other NGO or social type of activism. What do you think? Do you think there’s a particular reason why you were attracted to political work?

**BD:** I believed and I still believe that… I think I read that somewhere. It was part of my readings and I was very interested in philosophy during my last years of school, that I have an interest in changing the situation, and I cannot change it alone. So, change can be done by gathering people together, gathering the efforts and building a struggle. So I don’t believe in personal activism, and this is a trend also lately. I believe that change, and I have an interest to change, and people who have an interest to change like me… why I was interested? I wanted to change the world. I was fed up of the war, of sectarianism. Also as a woman, I want the society to change, to not be oppressed anymore by your parents or by your husband. So that was my purpose I think, yeah. And as a woman, my parents, my father wanted me to become a strong woman, and when I became a string woman, I started to fight with him, so… yeah, to change.

**NP:** Do you still believe in making change?

**BD:** Yes.

**NP:** That you can contribute to making change?

**BD:** I still believe that I can contribute maybe in writing about my experience until now, because now the situation is (inaudible 0:14:34:1) I don’t see how I can participate in other ways. I believe like after seeing the revolutions also that the social movement (inaudible 0:14:47:4) and can happen at any place where I don’t expect. But I believe that when it will happen, I will follow it, I will go after it. But on a personal level in this situation, I think I can… maybe in my writings, maybe in discussions, I can participate, because I don’t think that there is more that we can do now other than this. We need to leave you the history. I think it is crucial before doing anything, and I’m not sure if I want to be organizing work later on, but I still believe that change will not happen unless there is a big movement that will lead it.

**NP:** I remembered the question. I was going to ask you about the Left. Not just the Assembly, but the other independent Leftist groups. Do you think that in the period from when you started being involved with the old Left, the Communist part, and through your experience with different independent Left groups, do you think that the independent Left was an important sort of focus for young people? What other currents… maybe I can rephrase the question. What other political currents have independent Left groups been competing with over the past two decades? Who were the main competitors for the independent Left?

**BD:** I think the Communist party, the classical Left I mean, because they wanted to recruit their people, and they wanted to be differentiated from it, and… also I think Hezbollah, because they act on a main area of the Left to resist Imperialism, but they kind of want to influence, and sometimes influence and/or oppose in a really radical way, but mainly these, because the discourse is mainly on being Communist in Lebanon is the Communist party still, until now, this is the problem, and it’s still existent because it’s old and has history. So I think both, yeah. Yes…

**NP:** Is there anything I didn’t ask you that you think is important? Anything that you haven’t had an opportunity to talk about?

**BD:** No, I can’t remember anything right now, but I think I talked a lot. But if you still have questions you can send me by e-mail. I’ll be more than glad to answer.

**NP:** Okay, thank you very much.

**BD:** You’re welcome.

**NP:** Thank you.