

## **Selina Robertson**

Welcome, my name is Selina, and I'm from Club des Femmes. We are a queer feminist film collective, and together with So, Jenny and Maria, we welcome you to this live q&a with filmmaker Pratibha Parmar and writer Lola Olufemi, which is part of Between Us We Have Everything We Need, a weekend of films, discussion, and new writing and art making centred around Pratibha's film *A Place of Rage* from 1991.

The film is an urgent, a still urgent history of African American women who drove the civil rights, Black Power, and LGBTQ and feminist movements in the US.

The film is available now to rent on VOD at a discounted price of £8, until the newly extended date of Sunday the 23rd August and thank you to Pratibha for that. Closed Caption subtitles are also available for the first time, and thank you to Emilia from Collective Texts for your brilliant work, and I think she's here this evening as well.

We've got a limited number of codes for free rentals of the film for this period for those who self ID as low or no, no wage, so please get in touch with us on the chat in a private message, if you want to watch the film. And thank you to everyone who's donated a free view as part of our pay it forward scheme.

The idea for this weekend was sparked by our friend Anna, she said that she wished that more people had the chance to watch *A Place of Rage* right now. This right now is a moment for meaningful action, and what we as a feminist collective do and produce counts as film programmers. It's a historical moment and a conjuncture that Angela Davis recently said in an interview "holds possibilities for change that we have never had never experienced before." And in the same interview Professor Davis draws attention to an historical continuum between the 1960s civil rights movements and now. And these were also some of the ideas we explored in relation

to feminism when we programmed *A Place of Rage*, as part of our UK-wide film tour “Revolt She Said: Women in Film After ‘68,” in partnership with the Independent Cinema Office in the summer of 2018.

So thank you, Anna for the idea, and thank you, Pratibha for your film and incredible activism, and a huge heartfelt thanks for the artists: to the artists, filmmakers, practitioners, and writers – our collaborators who we’ve had the pleasure to work with in realising this special weekend. I’d also like to thank our funders Film Feels Connected, and to the ICO and LUX for their in-kind sponsorship. And as this is a BFI funded project, we’d like to draw attention to the online survey which would be amazing if you could take a moment to fill in after this session, or after any of the weekend’s events. The survey and the weekend full programme will put [in the chat] as links, and it’s also on our website.

And also we want to draw attention to Irenosen Okojie’s amazing new piece of writing on *A Place of Rage*, which is on our website as well. A second livestream event is on tomorrow between 4 and 5 pm, where our short filmmakers Rhea Storr and Onyeka Igwe from B.O.S.S. Collective and Ufuoma Essi will be in a roundtable discussion. You can sign up by event right until three o’clock, and all the details are on our website and in the chat, and three of our short films are free to stream on Vimeo until Sunday, midday. And do check out Grace Barber-Plentie and Javie Huxley’s affecting responses to the shorts on our website.

This evening is free, but we would suggest donating to all sharing the crowdfunder for Sistah Space, a Hackney-based charity dedicated to supporting African and Caribbean heritage women and girls affected by domestic and sexual abuse.

A few housekeeping things: I'm sure most of you know this but it's good to say it again please keep your mics and cameras off, and we're recording the session so please do change your screen name if you'd like to. Please be kind and respectful in the chat. And we suggest that you put your questions for Pratibha in the chat and we'll share them with her at the end of the discussion. Now I'd like to hand over to Lola, who will host the discussion with Pratibha. Lola Olufemi is a Black feminist writer, organiser, and Stuart Hall Foundation scholar from London. Her work focuses on the uses of the feminist imagination and its relationship to political demands to futurity. She is the author of *Feminism, Interrupted: Disrupting Power* from 2020, and a member of Bare Minimum and interdisciplinary anti-work arts collective, over to you, Lola.

### **Lola Olufemi**

Hello everyone, and thank you so much for being here. So how this is gonna work is that me and Pratibha are gonna have a conversation for about forty minutes, and then there'll be time for questions afterwards. I want to thank Club des Femmes for asking us to do this. I'm going to introduce Pratibha and then we'll get right to it. So Pratibha Parmar is an award winning filmmaker recognised as a pioneering unique artist who brings a passionate commitment to making films with integrity and illuminating untold stories. She has directed award winning documentary films for the BBC, Channel 4, PBS and European broadcasters. Her credits include *Alice Walker: Beauty and Truth*, a feature-length documentary on the life of Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Color Purple*, and the groundbreaking film *Khush*, one of the first films to give visibility to and highlight the experiences of LGBT+ people in India. She made

her debut as a narrative director with her award winning film *Nina's Heavenly Delights*. A globally recognised filmmaker and human rights activists Pratibha's accomplishments have been recognised with multiple awards. In 2017, she was awarded the Icon Award, presented by Bagri London Indian Film Festival in association with the British Film Institute for Outstanding Contribution to Indian and world cinema; in 2016 she was included in the BBC's list of 100 inspirational and influential women. She is the proud recipient of the Frameline Film Festival Award, presented to an individual who has made a significant and outstanding contribution to lesbian and gay cinema.

So I watched *A Place of Rage*, and I hadn't watched it, actually, before. I watched it last week and then I watched it again before this conversation. And I guess I wanted to start Pratibha by asking you what the impetus for this film was. I'm always really interested in origin stories. And so I want to ask you what the, a little bit about the creative process for this project, and how that creative process kind of overlapped with your own journey to political consciousness, or steps taken towards thinking critically about the world. So we could start there.

### **Pratibha Parmar**

Well, okay, well thank you Club des Femmes for having this event, and thank you Lola for being the moderator and asking, sending me such interesting questions to think about in the last day or so.

So how did, yeah, origin stories. I think origin stories are really important and I think that for me as a filmmaker, it's, you know my films, or most of my films are not ideas that come up from somewhere else but they come up, emanate from within me – and

the whole of me and my political self and my emotional self. And I would say the origin story for this film really was back when I was 15. And when I first read Angela Davis's book *If They Come In The Morning: Voices Of Resistance*, and it's a book she'd edited. It's a collection of writings, James Baldwin and Erica Huggins, and Huey P. Newton. But Angela had also written in the book about her own trial and what had happened, and her own activism at that time. And I had only been living in England at the time for about three years because my parents were immigrants from Kenya. And so when we got there I was 12, and so when I read this book, Angela's book, it was just this like explosion for me. I think that that was just planted these, and catalysed these kind of seeds of understanding. I mean, if at the time I would not have called it political consciousness, but I think that's what it did, it politicised me. It helped me to understand what my mother was going through as a sweatshop worker in, you know, horrendous conditions and trying to make a living so we will be fed. It helped me to understand why I was being called a paki and a wog on the school playground and what that was about. So, you know that book was kind of pivotal in my own journey to understand that there was this world that was divided on class lines, that was divided on race lines. And that was actually possible to resist these received notions of what the world should look like; that we could do something about that, that we could change that, you know, through our resistance and I think Angela's book did that for me.

And then fast forward many, many, years later, I got, I was gifted a book called *Civil Wars*, which is a book by June Jordan, an early collection of her writing. I was gifted the book by Paul Gilroy, and I hadn't heard of June Jordan at that time. And I read this book and again it was another one of those moments of sort of being able to

metabolise like the very personal things that were happening with a much more, bigger, macro kind of understanding of what was happening with systems of oppression. So, you know, June, is a, was a poet, and she, she could like write a line of poetry, which began with such a beautiful description of how the sunlight hit her lover's long hair, or a strand of her hair on the pillow, and then go to, like, talking about Vietnam and talking about, you know. So she could take us on this journey from really from the very, very minute personal comments, or perception, to something much deeper, or as deep and incisive, in our understanding of the world and. And so, I was aware of June's writing and of course you know Alice Walker's books – *In Search of My Mother's Gardens* was another one of those facts that I remember reading on holiday on a beach in Portugal and being completely blown away by it.

So, all those three women have been like very kind of pivotal to my sort of growth as a political activist, as a feminist, and as a queer woman of colour. And then, you know, fast forward again many, many, years later, and June had apparently been in London doing a poetry reading, and I'd been away in India. And I just got back and I had a phone call from this magazine called *Spare Rib*, which at the time was the only feminist magazine that existed. And they asked me if I would do an interview with June Jordan, and I was like "What? Yeah, of course." And they said you only have one day so I had to go do it, like that afternoon. And so I didn't have really a lot of time to prepare for it. And I rushed over to Swiss Cottage – I remember that she was staying in this guest house in Swiss Cottage – and I rushed over there and started talking to her and she was like, kind of, you know, okay, so who are you, you know. And then when I sort of started to talk to her about her work with Buckminster Fuller,

to redesign Harlem, all these details of her life and her work, and she completely like it was she just lit up because you know she could see that I had done my research and I knew who she was, And then we just really you know we hit this fantastic interview, she was very giving very open. And we bonded over that. And, you know, she wanted to go for a walk so I took her around Swiss Cottage for a walk before her flight. And then I said, "Look, your work is not available here in the UK. And it should be published." And she said, "Okay, well, I'm game if you are." And so she entrusted me to like do this and, you know, and luckily I mean I've been, I have been part of the Sheba feminist collective.

And so, I had, you know, I got in touch with Virago and some feminist presses and over the next year got to two collections of poetry published. And then she came, June came over to England, she stayed with us in Finsbury Park at home, while she did the promotions. And then she said, "Right, I want to go to Paris. We African Americans, we always have to go to Paris, this is, you know, we have to do that trip." I said, "Okay, let's go to Paris." So the three of us said, we're heading off to Paris. And when we were in Paris, she said, "Oh, I have a friend who's also visiting here from the US, and I'd like to see her," we said "Okay, fine, let's go have dinner," and that friend turned out to be Angela Davis. And so there was this moment in Paris where we were with Angela Davis and June Jordan and just hanging out and going to the, you know, having dinner, you know, going to exhibitions and things, and that's when the idea for the film was born, because here were these two incredible women who had engaged with Black Power movement, the civil rights movement, who embodied those histories in their personal histories, and had shaped those movements too, through their activism and their writing. And, but very different

approaches: one is a poet and one was a Marxist, you know, had a different kind of approach to her activism. And I just thought it would be really interesting to explore that history through the lens of these two women, and what their stories were. And so that's how the film came about.

### **Lola Olufemi**

And I think one of the great kind of triumphs of this film is the way in which you put those different approaches in conversation. I think of it, specifically in terms of, I guess what Black feminist thinking and what Black feminist scholarship offers us right? It's this like meeting of minds and the meeting of form and genre. And I see that a lot in watching the film and I'm really interested in the kind of aesthetic choices that you made and the ways that you chose to represent them right. And so could you talk a bit about that? Like we were talking before we came on about the shots of Angela Davis running for example or playing squash, and June Jordan in this very kind of like relaxed posture, very open and giving. And I think when we think about these Black feminists who are so tied, tied so closely to revolution, tied so closely to political dissent and upheaval, that they're often represented in a specific way, and we as viewers only know them in this specific way. So could you talk about playing – what your intentions were behind those kinds of shots, and playing with visual representation in that way.

### **Pratibha Parmar**

Yeah. Sure, absolutely. I think that that was kind of a, you know, a very conscious intention of wanting to represent these women in their wholeness and that the



nuance of their daily lives. So that there's sort of these quotidian moments of, sort of, you know, getting on the Metro in New York with June Jordan, or Angela running or playing squash. I mean, these were, this is, these are the textures of their daily lives. Angela is, you know, takes care of herself. June takes care of herself, in that kind of that whole notion of self care, and how we as activists need to be aware of self care and what feeds our activism, you know, how do we keep our bodies and our minds intact, while we're on the front lines as these two women were.

And so there I saw in getting to know them, I saw their commitment to the self care in a way that I hadn't never experienced before. Because I too had had notions of, you know, political activists, as just that, that, you know, that that's all they did, they were like protesting or writing or, you know, that revolution was a different kind. I had a different idea about what revolution looked like in your day, or revolutionaries looked like in their daily lives, you know. And I just wanted to bring in these very intimate moments in their lives, so that we get to really see them as people and to get to spend time with them as people that, who are just as vulnerable who just as, you know, sort of, committed to taking care of themselves, you know.

### **Lola Olufemi**

And I think was a, that's incredibly apparent. And I want to pick up on the point that you were talking about this idea of, kind of care, like self care, but also thinking about the ways that Angela Davis and June Jordan talk about their service to community and their service to – why they do the things that they do, right? And I think those are incredibly intimate moments when they're able to be... the camera kind of lingers

and they're able to be honest about what drove them to a specific, to do a specific thing. I'm thinking specifically about when Angela says, "You know, I know that I wouldn't have chosen to be a public figure but I've chosen to position myself, or I was placed in this specific position, and I knew from there that I could do – I could make known things that weren't, you know, known before and that's what I've chosen to do." I guess I want to kind of connect that to what you then see as the artist's role in revolution, right, the artist's role in kind of uprisings. Because right now, we're in, you know, we're at a specific kind of political juncture, and this is, this movie also kind of happened at a specific political juncture, and I'm always thinking about the artist's role as kind of like propagandist. The artist's role as putting forward an argument for the way the world could be. And I see *A Place of Rage* kind of sitting in that tradition. And so I guess for you, yeah, what do you – what do you see as the artist's role in revolution? What are you trying to do as a documentary filmmaker? Are you always attempting to put forward an argument? Are you trying to elucidate, you know, specific people's lives or experiences or political structures? And yeah what good, what's the purpose of that intention?

### **Pratibha Parmar**

I think that, you know, I would sort of go back to my first kind of instinct to make film and make video. And, and where those instincts came from, and that came from my political activism, so that's, you know, where it was located, and that's kind of where I sort of – I'm still there. My work comes from this place of wanting to see change and create change. And to think about myself as an artist, and as an activist, and to think about myself as: what role can I play, what is my contribution to trying to change, to

create change. You know, and so I think that for me is a very individual set of decisions that I took, that, for me, the way forward was through the screen, and the power of media, and what we know the power of media to be is, you know, in visual representation particularly, and especially at the time when I was first starting out to make these films, was that there were very few representations of any women of colour or Black people, or LGBTQ experiences. And I saw what there was, was kind of the stereotype so there was kind of through the lens of a white male and or anthropological look at, you know, South Asian LGBTQ experiences in India, whatever, and I was like, “No, I think that this is... it’s time to change this and it’s time to change the lens.”

So I want to be able to find a way of telling stories that have not been seen before or not been told before. So I started out as a video artist and, you know, one of the first videos I made was called *Sari Red*, which I made for like £250, I borrowed a camera. And it was really my response, really a visceral response, to the killing of a young South Asian girl, Kalbinder Kaur Hayre, killed on the streets of London by three white fascists who drove their van straight into her. And when I read about this, I was enraged, and I felt that she could have been me or anyone else that I know. Because she was shouting back at them for the fact that they shouted racist abuse at her. And so she shouted back at them. She was standing up for her dignity. And, so that was one of the first videos that I made.

So it’s that impulse to use both my anger and my rage and my artistry, and also my dreamscapes. I mean *Khush*, and the film that I made *Nina’s Heavenly Delights*, they’re kind of also engaged with these imaginative spaces or creating different kinds of possibilities, you know.

With something, with a film like *A Place of Rage*, I made this for Channel4 television, which, now, I can not see that happening. I cannot see a film like this being commissioned, or me going in and saying, “Okay, you know I have this idea for this film,” which is what happened at that time. And that was because there was a very small space that had been created for minority voices for us to kind of have access to that platform. And that’s when I made *Khush* that’s when I made *A Place of Rage*. And, you know, it was kind of... *A Place of Rage* had this incredible impact because I would hear from so many different sources, about, people overhearing conversations at bus stops that women of colour or Black women were having, about seeing Angela Davis and June Jordan and Alice Walker on their screens, on their television screens, something that never happened before. And to me that’s a kind of direct political intervention in that kind of space, you know, with these representations, these stories, these histories and, and that was that sort of... Those early years when they had that kind of access to mainstream television, it’s like, “Whoa, this is, you know, this is one way in which I can be useful as a filmmaker.”

### **Lola Olufemi**

I think it really reminds me of that Stuart Hall idea that culture is the arena of lived experience, right? Like culture is life lived, and so it has a, it has a role in how we understand a political struggle or political movements or revolution. And what you were saying was it makes me think about how there did indeed used to be that space, you know from the kind of 60s onwards, for the televisual essay, but for theorists and thinkers to make arguments to an audience at a national scale.

I kind of want to pick up on what you said about rage. And I think for me, one of the most striking parts of the film is when June says, towards the end, that the inability to rage against evil or the enemy means turning inwards and means despair, as she's kind of reflecting on the breaking apart, or the dissolution of a movement as she knew it. And so I wanted to ask what the place of rage has been in your work, and just in general. And to think through how you think about anger as a useful emotion right, how you think about anger, as impetus you think about anger as something that that drives you to want to make and to want to create. So I guess, could you reflect on that and June's positioning of rage and anger and its relation I guess in kind of Black feminist thought.

### **Pratibha Parmar**

I think it's a really complicated question and a really complicated kind of area to think about, because I know that early on I was very much fueled by rage and anger.

Because I would not accept. You know, I felt that if I accepted the visions of the world that we were being fed, then the consequences of that for my life and the lives of so many other people were dire. We would, you know – so, so to me, those moments were definitely fueled by an anger and rage, at in with being excluded or being invisibilised, at being stereotyped, at being subjugated and not being given access to funding, not being given access to, you know, proper education not being given access to proper housing.

And I think that because I come from an immigrant family and I saw my parents really struggle to keep a roof over our heads and saw my mother working 12 hour days, you know, from a sweatshop. She then came to work, to be in the home with

her industrial sewing machine, which even after she stopped making, sewing, and we were all grown up, she would not let go of that sewing machine, because it was her security, you know, it was her security, and in terms of economic kind of viability of our being able to live in the UK.

So, having sort of, you know, absorbed all of that, I think that that's kind of really what is fed my desire for justice, for freedom, for equality. And so I'm attracted just, you know, obviously just attracted to women, Black feminists, feminists of colour.

Particularly women who embody a certain kind of resistance to accepted notions of who and what we should be. And I think that that, you know, that's where, sort of, particularly this film comes from, for me.

But then, you know, sort of, having been in kinship with both June – in, really kind of a daily way, and becoming family – and then having a similar kind of relationship with Alice Walker... I see again really two very different ways in which they deal with anger and with rage, and how they metabolise it and how they deal with it. And, you know, so from Alice I have learned that, you know, you have to go spend ten minutes on the hammock or, you know, just take time out to nourish yourself, and to kind of, you know, not allow our lifeforce to be drained by the anger, that is kind of incited in us because of what we see around us. And so it's this kind of dance, I feel, for me personally, that I make, of how I balance out my anger says that it doesn't immobilise me, it doesn't make me ill, but it leaves me empowered enough to be able to continue to do the work that I want to do.

I was just gonna say, because I've seen casualties, you know, I've seen casualties amongst ourselves of how women have got ill, you know, and have really, that the lifeforce has been drained, because they are constantly in struggle, and then

constantly kind of being fueled by anger. And I think that anger, it has you know as Audre said, Audre Lorde said, anger has its fantastic uses. And you know, going on the Black Lives Matter protests here down in Oakland, you know, you see and feel that rage and feel the anger. And it is right, it is rightful anger, it's righteous anger, because we are seeing every day, the killing of Black people in this country where I'm living right now.

The first week I was here, like seven years ago, the first week I had arrived here in the Bay Area. I was in my car waiting at the traffic lights, and I saw these two policemen literally drag out this elder, this Black guy out of his car, threw him to the ground, and put their knee on his neck. And I was like... I couldn't believe what I was watching. I mean, I know we have police brutality in the UK, but this is like... this was just like literally feet away, six feet away from me. And it's a common thing here. And you know, so I get angry about that, I get enraged about that, but as an artist, what can I do about it? And you know, so one of the things I did do recently is I offered my services as a director for this major funding event, for a fundraising event for black organizations doing work around justice. It was something called *While We Breathe*, a night of creative protest. And so, I directed Neil Brown Jr., an actor who did this monologue, it's called "Pre Existing Condition." And it was like, I can't go out with a crew and film anything right now, but I did it through zoom, and he was at home on his iPhone, and this is how we made it work. You find the ways and the means to create the work that needs to be created in these moments of resistance, these moments of change.

And I think Angela is so absolutely right that you know this is... there's something we're seeing right now that is happening that we haven't, you know, I haven't seen

before. And if she's saying she hasn't seen before from, you know, all the decades of her activism, then I think that it's a moment that's both, you know, really exciting, because you can see that the possibilities of that change happening here. But having lived under Trump for the last four years or so, it's, you know, this was a moment that was waiting to happen. It's a moment that was waiting to happen. So anyway back to your question around rage and anger. So obviously I'm still kind of fueled by it, you know because of what I see around me and, and I try and, you know, try and use my art to do, to try and sort of create interventions.

### **Lola Olufemi**

I was thinking about what you said, I think often I guess what happens is, you know, America as a global centre, as an imperial core, we think about the violence that happens there as exceptionalised, and I was thinking about right now you know in the midst of the movements that we're in in the UK and kind of globally, thinking about you know how we decentre America and American history as *the* definitive history of, you know, black life. And watching this film what I got was, you know, some sense that there is an internationalist solidarity, maybe that's too kind of facile a phrase. But there's, there's something that happens when we take interest in different histories and I wondered if you could, I guess kind of briefly speak to the idea of you as someone who spent their formative, I guess, years in the UK or was educated in the UK, and did your filmmaking kind of there, to then turn your eye towards a history that was kind of different to your own, and what happens in that exchange and what you were able to bring of your experiences, having lived in the



UK and your understanding of political histories here, to turn back to the exchanges that you had with Angela Davis and June Jordan and Alice Walker.

**Pratibha Parmar**

Yeah. Yeah, I mean I think, you know, it's really interesting to think about, sort of, how those international connections get made. And I think that, and what is it that drives different individuals to make those connections politically and artistically. And I think for myself, you know, as I said my kind of political consciousness, you know, I owe so much of that to these women, to Angela Davis June Jordan, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, you know, Toni Cade Bambara. These they were the writers and the activists who I was reading, when I was coming to my feminist consciousness. And so for me it didn't feel like that, I was in any way, that this was something happening to someone else, because they spoke to me. They spoke to my experiences as much as they were speaking to their specificity. And I think that, you know, when June says in her in the film where she said, towards the end, she says you know I was born a Black woman but I am become a Palestinian. I mean, therein lies a multitude of kind of layered understandings and thinking about, what are boundaries, where is the merging between I and them, and me and Palestine. Where is the merging happening in terms of our common humanity. And I mean, that's what June is talking about there really, that, you know, let's make ourselves, let's make our way home. What, what is this home that she is talking about? Is this is the home, you know, at a time when Palestinian homes are being demolished? Whose home, is she talking about, she's talking about the collective home of humanity. That we have to

kind of, you know. What is geography is just shaped around countries, boundaries, you know.

But in terms of sort of the sort of knock-on effects of different kinds of liberation movements that, you know, that have had internationally. I think that we have to see that those international connections... So I know that the Naxalites in India were really inspired by the Black Power movement that was happening. You know, um, the many movements for independence in certain African countries were inspired by, and took from what was happening in the US at the time in the 60s. And it was one of the questions that, interestingly, I would get asked when I first made this film and it was, I was going around with it here in the US. And the question I would get asked is, How come you as this Indian woman knows about our history, and why are you interested in this, our history. You know, and I'd get this from a range of different kinds of people. And one of the things I think, when I said to them that actually this is not a localised, or while it was localised, the repercussions, the inspirations, that fight for self-determination, that fight against segregation in the apartheid South here in the US, all of those had global repercussions, had global kind of magnifications, where people could see that you did not have to, like, put up with your own, you know, oppression, that you too could organise and come together. And so I think that there is a kind of a symbiotic relationship between different movements of liberation and revolutionary change

### **Lola Olufemi**

Yeah I think maybe that's what characterised that specific moment right this like this not wanting to capitulate to our imaginations and our demands to the border, or to

recognise that you know reciprocally, there were strategies that could be shared kind of transnationally.

I want to get, make sure that there's time for some questions. People would love to know about the music in the film, especially the story behind getting *Sign O The Times* to be played at the very beginning. Could you please tell that story.

### **Pratibha Parmar**

Yeah, so well music for me is really important as a filmmaker as a kind of a, sort of, you know, another narrative voice, and another storytelling voice within the film, and particularly with this film. You know, you know that what the sort of the nexus of kind of racism and art in the US has given rise to this huge body of kind of musical work, you know. I mean, John Coltrane's album that he made with this band *Birdland*, you know, which was a response to the bombing of the four girls, little girls, in Birmingham, Alabama. I mean you hear those saxophone riffs and you're like, your stomach churns, and you feel: this is an artist's response to that, what, what was happening as a witness, witnessing as an artist.

And so I think that I was kind of really very consciously drawing on that tradition of protest music of – which is, it continues to this day I mean there's this kind of incredible, kind of, impromptu raps that you know, downtown Oakland, that erupt during the BLM protests. The Prince song I mean, you know, it was, it just felt absolutely the right song and the lyrics, it captured the tone and captured the mood of the filming, and that moment. And, and you know I was making this for Channel Four, and the music supervisor said, "No way, Pratibha, there's no way for Prince is

ever gonna give you, we don't even approach him, they never give permission for this." And I said, "But I want to try!" You know, cuz I've never taken no for an answer. So it's like, "I wanna try, without trying, we don't know." And so I got the details for his manager. And luckily, he was still Prince and not 'the squiggle' at the time, because I don't know... But I sat down at my typewriter, it was actually a typewriter, and I wrote, "Dear Prince, I'm writing to you..." And I wrote this letter to him and told him about the film and said why I felt it was really important to use this song. And then within two days, I had this phone call and it said, "Yes." It wasn't him, you know, but it was somebody from his office who says, "Yes, you can. You can, you can use it. It's okay." Just so casual you know, just so aaaah! You know, the Channel Four music supervisors was like, "Whoa, that never happens!" So, you know, it was just that film. It's just like the moment was just amazing, how that happened. You know?

### **Lola Olufemi**

That's incredible. I actually selfishly have a question that I wanted to ask about kind of queer life and the role of queer life in a revolution, and how often I think it's kind of seen as maybe just a coincidence that a lot of kind of revolutionaries or a lot of people that we associate with political dissent are queer. Yeah, and for me, when June was kind of talking about it in the documentary, it really struck me this idea of like, there would be no Left as we understand it, if we didn't have you know, queer people organising. You know, lesbians are always, you know, the first to meet – the first to hold a meeting. That's always been kind of true. And so I was wondering for you what the role or relationship between women and queerness and political organising has been in your work, how queerness has kind of presented itself in your

work, and how it kind of shapes the concerns, or shapes the things that you think are important, and the things that you choose to highlight. And how we begin to, to kind of think about it less as an individual, innate biological thing and more like a political orientation, right, like a political stance that moves you in certain directions, because that's what I see when I watch documentaries like this. I'm like, okay, it all makes sense in that way.

### **Pratibha Parmar**

Yeah. That's great. Yeah. So how to answer that? I mean, it can... so many ways I could answer that. But I would say you know, that I bring so much of who I am to my films. So my lens is sort of, you know, it's a queer lens. It's a queer woman of colour's lens, you know. That's just what it is, it is, you know, just in the same way that, you know, I would say that activism is part of my DNA. You know, my mother, when she was a young girl in India was part of the non-violent protest against the British imperialists, and with young women in her college would go out at midnight, and pull up wires from the railway lines when they knew that train was coming with British soldiers. So she was like an activist and was involved in – not that she called herself up. And I would say that that's it's like in my DNA is that notion of this kind of activism.

And, you know, queer is not just about, as you quite rightly say, it's not just about a particular choice of my sexuality, but it is also the way in which throughout all my films the lens is as a queer lens. And that queer, you know is, it's so beyond just the identity of being queer, but it is about a way of looking at the world, and it's about a way of reimagining the world. And that you know in so much – I would also say like

you know in Octavia Butler – in so much speculative fiction, there is a level, there is a way in which there's a queer lens at work there whether the writer is queer or not, but I think that I see that, you know, embodiment of a certain kind of queer, you know, I wouldn't call it epistemology, but there is a certain kind of a queer sort of narrative, at play. And, you know, there's – there's that notion of how you, sort of really self-destructive notion of how, you know, we can get so bogged down in these identities. And it's so much beyond that. Not saying that our identities are not important and self definition is not important, because it's been a really big part of my journey. But, you know, I mean, right now, like, you know, people are sort of this, these huge debates and discussions around trans lives and, you know, within feminism. And you know, I see that there's ways in which some feminists are like, "Yeah you know, I'm all for trans lives," but what are you doing about it? You know, what are you actually doing about that. And so to me queerness is about always interacting with the world in a way that we are keeping, always keeping in mind that we have the right and the agency to reshape the world, in any way in which we want. And that I think does come from the fact that so many of us as queers have been marginalised have been, you know, shunned from our own communities and our own families, in my case, you know, and so many of us have experienced that. So that in the end it's like you know when you're shunned by your family as a queer woman, who is your family? Then, you know, you create your own families, you create your own communities. And so when there isn't any kind of investment in any givens of what we are born with. Then I think that that in itself becomes a queer way of looking at the world.

## **Lola Olufemi**

Absolutely, I guess, um, to round off, I wanted to pick another question people are interested in, what you're working on next and what your kind of next direction is I guess with your work.

## **Pratibha Parmar**

I'm working on a couple of multiple projects. I'm working on a book. It kind of keeps taking a backseat. I'm working on a hybrid documentary, which is based on the writings of a controversial radical feminist from the 1970s and 80s, Andrea Dworkin, again one of those women in feminist history who was an outlaw, who was shunned, who, you know, had this particular kind of persona. And so I've been working on that film for a number of years and I was really interested in... I mean it's a film that actually somebody suggested to me, a couple of producers came to me with the idea to make a film on her. And I was like, oh I don't know, you know, because I'd actually written a critique of her position on pornography, way back in the 80s and it got published and you know. So I knew some of her work, but I didn't really know... So I said, "Well, let me think about it, let me read her books," and I started to read her books. And I have to say Lola, I was like, blown away. I was like, Whoa, I didn't know this Andrea Dworkin, I didn't know this poet. I didn't know this philosopher, you know, and that's who she was. And so, I, you know, read all her books, I watched a lot of archival of her, and listened to a lot of her radio interviews. And then I wrote a screenplay, which is... so it's a hybrid. And for me, the theme of the violation of the female body, which she writes brilliantly about, and from her own personal experience, of having experienced sexual assault at an early age, you know, being a

survivor of domestic abuse. So I kind of was like, a lot of what she was saying about toxic patriarchy and what she was, how she was writing about the ways in which her own experiences framed within sort of this idea about how women are always seen less than human. All of these ideas really kind of sparked me. And so I've been working on that. And, you know, I've been working, but you have five actresses and I've shot two of the chapters of the film with them. Amandla Stenberg is one, and a French musician actress called Soko the other, so we shot those two. And we are going to be hoping to shoot in October the rest of, the other three chapters, but with COVID they're just... I'm having to revise my script, and take into consideration how to shoot it, you know, cos you can't out on the streets and shoot anything.

**Lola Olufemi**

Yeah. Yeah, I think, I think, maybe Dworkin is an apt place to end in a way because –  
Can you hear me. Hello? Hello. Hi. Can you hear me.

**Pratibha Parmar**

Yeah, I can hear you now. I think something happened, my earpods went...

**Lola Olufemi**

I was just saying maybe Dworkin is a good place to end, because for all of her faults and for whatever we think about her, in her writing rage is apparent. It's very apparent and takes kind of centre stage, and that's interesting as a thing to explore on its own. So I just want to say thank you so much for this conversation, it's been so



wonderful. Thank you again for the film. Thank you everyone for listening and I hope you enjoyed the conversation. This has been wonderful.

**Pratibha Parmar**

Thank you so much Lola, was wonderful to talk to you. Yeah. All right.

**Lola Olufemi**

Bye everyone.

**Pratibha Parmar**

Bye.