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Podcast transcript:

Kyra: Hi everyone, welcome back to the podcast. For this episode, we are in conversation with a Reader in Law & Social Justice, Dr Suhraiya Ahmed, based at the University of Kent, and Dr Ahmed Memon, a Senior Lecturer at the Cardiff School of Law & Politics. In this episode, we discuss their journey into higher education and some of their major influences. We then delve into their previous work together at the University of Kent, specifically their engagement with student-staff partnership as a praxis. And, finally, we reflect on some of their theorising on this topic in the context of decoloniality and fostering spaces of continuing resistance through re-existence.

Suhraiya: I grew up in London, and where am I now? I've been in Kent for the last 20 years or so because that's where I did my PhD and where I'm working at the University, in the Law School there.

Ahmed: So, I grew up in Pakistan for most of my life, until the age of 24, in a city called Karachi. I came here for my Master's about nine years ago, and I continued with a PhD and then got into academia at Kent. I moved from Kent for just about a few months – I didn't technically move, I virtually moved, in terms of work to Glasgow for one term, and then I got a job at Cardiff and currently am based in Cardiff.

Kyra: Amazing... What is both of your roles in academia at the moment? Obviously, Suhraiya, you're based in Kent, Ahmed, you're based in Cardiff, and I guess what was your journey into higher education?

Ahmed: I actually came from a practising background in Pakistan, very different from the work that I do today, and even intellectual – I mean, there was no tradition, it was just practice. That was the tradition and that was a very specific kind of commercial company law, IP law, practice that I started off my legal career in Pakistan with. But I just couldn't take it, you know, it was not for me, I was not happy. There was money but I didn't – I mean, that's not what I wanted to kind of do, I wasn't happy, and so I started applying for scholarships in the UK - my parents couldn't afford to send me on full tuition fee – and I thankfully got a scholarship for my Master's, and I came from my Master's, and the fear was that I wouldn't be able to say because I obviously couldn't afford the PhD tuition fee, so I



applied for other scholarships for a PhD at Kent and I got a full scholarship at Kent and so that's how I continued to be in higher education.

Suhraiya: Yeah. So, I also come from a practice background, but less in terms of a legal practice and more in terms of...campaigning and advocacy work. So, I worked for different organisations for...about 15 years, from...across...in different places across the world. So, I worked for the UN in Geneva, and I worked in Pakistan as well actually, in the north, and...I worked for...an organisation called Women Living Under Muslim Laws, which was around... on a specific project which was around gathering legal strategies for women dealing with different issues in different jurisdictions, so different locations, and sharing good practice around...in addressing Islamic law issues. And I worked for Amnesty International for a while as well. So, I had quite a kind of broad experience across anti-discrimination and equalities work. And it's...it can be quite depleting, so I was quite burnt-out at a certain point, and I met a professor who said, "Hey, why don't you come and, you know, join us for a research fellowship for a while at the University of Kent?" at the centre which I'm now director actually, co-director, the Centre for Law, Gender & Sexuality, as it was then – it's now...we've renamed it so it's now the Centre for Sexuality, Race & Gender Justice. So, I was really fortunate to have this kind of month where I could just go and reflect on the ethics of the very fast paced work that I was involved in and, you know, that sometimes I just wasn't sure about, how we were going about it, so it was a really...very important and needed opportunity to have this hiatus of reflection.

And then I got into some teaching there and they said, you know, "Why don't you stay [laughing] and do a PhD?" so I did, and that was kind of my route into academia. I kind of kept feet in both, so I haven't completely abandoned the grassroots work that I was doing before, but working with different organisations and, yeah, trying to kind of.. I know we're going to be talking about student-staff partnerships, but thinking about partnership more broadly between academia and work on the ground that... You know, because, for me, academia was very much kind of ivory tower – that had been my perception of it, and that's not why I entered academia at all. But I think the...what's really amazing about university spaces is the opportunity to reflect and research and have this space to think beyond the boundaries of one's current...ways of working and thinking. So, yeah...and so now, I've been there, as I said, for quite a while, and I'm a reader in Law and Social Justice, and I worked on Education for quite a while, so as part of the Education team and co-director of Education, but I'm now in the research team and a co-director of research, as well as, like I said, a co-director of the Centre for Sexuality, Race & Gender Justice.

Kyra: So, I guess I'm keen to find out like who or what were some of your major influences? Suhraiya, you've already spoken about how there was people in the institution already kind



of, I guess, rooting for you, in a sense, and wanting to see you kind of really come back into academia and succeed that way, but was there anything else?

Suhraiya: Yeah, I mean, definitely. I think, if it wasn't for key people and inspirations, you know, coming up in my life at certain times, I would have had probably a very different trajectory in life. So, yeah, I mentioned a professor who was very supportive of me coming, Professor Davina Cooper, who's worked in – she's now based at King's and she works in the equalities field as well.

Prior to that, I think, you know, I had...I grew up in London, as I said, and I had quite a... religious upbringing, and...so a lot...but in quite a kind of...with a lot of theoretical input as well, so a lot of Islamic philosophy, theology, etc. So, at a certain point, I got really interested in reformists' perspectives on Islamic theology and, em, particularly Muslim feminists, which, at that time, was a really kind of small banding of scholarship, and, actually, today, I just saw there's a new book being launched soon on Muslim feminisms, which is great to see because it's really proliferated, and I think that has probably been the single most important influence in my life, and, you know, I can mention lots of women, and men, who are part of that field.

And then, I suppose, once I got into...well, through my Masters, there was a lot of kind of talking about people like...oh, I can't remember his name now, but, you know, key leftists who...and the introduction to kind of critical thinking, particularly around human rights, so Issa Shivji, [Abdullah ? Nayeem], who is also talking about reformist perspectives on Islamic law and theology. So, yeah, kind of a mixed...a mixed pathway, but very kind of religion-focused, and my PhD was on the religion of law actually, and that introduced me also to critical race theory and critical race feminism, and then, later on, decolonial studies, which is kind of the areas that I specialise in now.

Ahmed: So, I think it just, for me, I guess the answer is a bit complex in terms of exactly where...who influenced me. In truth, me coming to HE and academia and trying to pursue that path was also kind of an escape from [laughing] the context of Pakistan, for various kind of personal reasons as well, my positionality and everything, but, em... I mean, I was quite... quite keen on getting out of a particular political social system that I just did not kind of understand and did not kind of relate to, and a lot of those things were...were...for me... difficult to...to adjust to, partially because of, again, I guess this goes back to how I saw my faith and the kind of people that really kind of admired and independently read, even though, I mean, this wasn't really my field – I was just a commercial lawyer and that was the job I got [to get along]. But I got a lot into kind of classic [Sufi] literature at a very early age, and then was slowly introduced to liberation theology, essentially just researching on my



own and kind of reading through and through, but I never really kind of got into advanced scholars until I went to do my PhD, and in fact, when I got into my Master's, in a completely different...I'd say kind of a secular sense, an understanding of the world that was really, really influenced by some of my lecturers who were here. I mean, one of the key people who really kind of I think has shaped how I want to be an academic, just as a person, is Professor Donatella Alessandrini. She was one of the first people – at that time, I think she was the director of postgraduate teaching, when I came in for my Master's. I had never felt... I was a scholarship holder so we'd be invited to meetings, and it was very odd because she would treat me – even though I knew I was a professional, there's a certain cultural expectation that we have back home around academia, but she was one of the key people who just treated me with...just mutual respect and trust, and that was a shock for me. It was a weird cultural shock for me and a professional shock for me. Because, even in a professional setting, that's not how you're treated in law firms and companies that I've worked with back home, when you're a junior. And I mean she...primarily her ethic, her kind of way of approaching things, and the kind of critical literature on international law that I was introduced, and one of the intellectual persons that really shifted my kind of thinking around my world and was my gateway towards kind of critical international legal thinking was Anthony [Unke], and his book was quite like foundational to...and still is, in the Centre for Critical International Law, [but] later became part of them and still like a research associate there.

So, that kind of...built my path into doing a PhD, where I could bring those perspectives in... particularly in the discipline of International Law, through certain questions around how global governance operates. But when I started my PhD, for my first two years, I really, really struggled intellectually, theoretically, and [epistemologically]. Part of the reason was that I just could not square my political perspective with a lot of literature that I was trying to intercede into, and I was not, at that point, well versed into broader decolonial theory beyond Islamic philosophy. I really wasn't. And, in this particular context, I wasn't talking about the Muslim world really, in kind of an [epistemological] sense. And I think it was in my third year or...end of the third year, middle of the third year, that I had started to slowly... and, somehow, I'm not sure how, it was just through research, I had come across Linda Tuhiwai Smiths 'Decolonising Methodologies', and that really shifting my mind and, at the same time, I had come across [Franz Fanon] and I was like, oh, this makes a lot of sense – [Franz Fanon, Akeem Nimbe and Annabelle Werhano]. So, these were the scholars within... not...definitely not International Law scholars, were in decolonial theory, that were the first people that I kind of caught onto and said these are the people that I need to use theoretically in my PhD.

It was also just a little after that that I was introduced by Suhraiya by a...a colleague, a senior colleague, and our introduction happened because I was involved in student politics and I was part of...I was a cultural rep, and there was a rise, a very active and explicit rise, of



fascist student movement within Kent at that point when I got into Student Union politics in my 3rd year. And it was very difficult being part of the Student Union at Kent at that particular point, and very frustrating. I almost resigned at a particular point when there was almost a motion that was going to be passed on admitting a known Zionist, anti-Palestinian organisation as part of student society. And, at the same time, I had found out about the so-called Debate Society that students were forming and they were going to kind of, you know, be a platform for alt. right and fascist kind of talking points. And I wanted to talk to someone who had experience in inequalities, discrimination, and that kind of thing, from an activist perspective, and, in the Law School, we were mostly academics, thinking very theoretically and critically, and then I asked a colleague, whose work was in fascism and international law, a senior colleague, and she kind of took me to Suhraiya's office, and that was first time I remember meeting Suhraiya actually, and kind of telling her kind of...strategy of "What do I do over here and what are the kind of possible ways we can kind of counter this through other mechanisms?" And that's where...when it comes to mentorship, that's where kind of a big influence of me navigating academia [evolved]. I mean, that's why the answer was a bit complicated. Intellectually and spiritually, I've had different kind of...influences, but in terms of how to be an academic that navigates as an organiser and activist, I think Suhraiya was one of my biggest. Amongst another group of women that Suhraiya introduced me to, [?] classroom, there were three women, [?, Angela and Deborah Bruce], and they were a massive influence in how I now consider myself to be an academic actually.

Kyra: I guess I want to kind of start the first half of our conversation and dedicate it to thinking about partnership, specifically the partnerships between students and staff, and this has obviously played quite a significant role in both of your journeys through higher education, as you both kind of mentioned, thinking about kind of mentorship and also introducing you to particular theories that have forced you to almost kind of unlearn the kind of knowledges that you've been conditioned to just from growing up in particular contexts. But, to begin with, when did you both first engage in student-staff partnership as a kind of praxis?

Suhraiya: Mm, yeah, when did this start...? That's quite a tough question [laughing]... because I'm sure that it would have started before I consciously even realised that, you know, this is...this is what I'm doing. I think, if you come from particular backgrounds, like Ahmed said, you know, it's...you're used to being treated a particular way, and you're trying to kind of do things differently just because of your particular goals and... I mean, I was...as part of my job before I entered academia, I was doing a lot of training and I was doing...you know, equalities and anti-discrimination training, so I was meeting a lot of people and I was working in partnership with different organisations. I mean, when I was working at Amnesty, I was working with, you know, the families of victims of human rights violations, so, in a sense, to bring about legal change, bring about awareness. So, in a sense, I came from a background of working in partnership with people and that being really at the core of what...



how I wanted to do my work praxis, my life praxis. And so, it was kind of a natural flow into when I then was in academia and teaching because I...you know, like Ahmed, I remembered how I was treated as a student, and, actually, these...these are people, you know, these are people with different...coming from different backgrounds, with different challenges. They're not just these vessels that you pour knowledge into and then they go off and, you know, do their employability thing. And I think that way of approaching and working facilitates, naturally, different...different impact and different results.

But I suppose to use the example of where Ahmed and I started working together... So, I run a module called – at that time, it was called Race, Religion, and Law. At the time, I was hearing...it was the time at which, 2017, the time at which the statistics were coming out around how students of colour were graduating with so-called lower or lesser degrees, or, you know, not a second, a 2/1, or first class degree, as compared to their white peers, and it was being labelled as “the attainment gap”. And I remember sitting in this meeting at work and thinking, “What [laughing]?!” and, suddenly, my blood pressure is rising and, you know, this very visceral reaction to what instinctively seemed to me like a totally racialised narrative of so-called attainment and success. So, I kind of sat with that for a while, and then I took back to my students and I said to them, “Hey, you know, I’ve just been listening to this – what do you make of it?” So, I think there’s that kind of...that conversational bit where you feel confident enough with your students to actually...to actually not just be the conveyor of knowledge but actually part of a conversation, and you have this discursive space in the classroom. And it was brilliant because, you know, they hadn’t heard of it, and they had, again, very visceral reactions, different reactions, and we could talk about it, and from there was born a project – we came together and we effectively, you know, explored these...these perceptions, these ideas, and actual barriers to learning that students were experiencing, and that became the Decolonising the Curriculum Project. That, essentially, is how, you know, partnerships, working in partnership like that, or being open to and not thinking about student-staff relationships in this kind of hierarchical way – of course you have responsibilities as a member of staff that put you in a different positionality, and you have to respect that and take that seriously, but that doesn’t mean that you can’t engage with students in a way that actually sees...sees them as, you know, in a kind of 360 way, as opposed to just, em, like I said, you know, vessels that you pour knowledge into.

Ahmed: I think, just to add to that, what was interesting is that, em, to me, my personal partnership with Suhraiya started when she opened her doors in this very kind of... I mean, I was a PhD student at that time and I, in that particular year, wasn’t teaching as well, so was really not involved in anything staff related. And I was heavily always involved with students, in the sense of being part of the Islamic Society, kickstarting and really kind of trying to put together a more cohesive [running sense of] Pakistan Society, [?]. I mean, I always came – so my perspective might be slightly different in terms of experience over here, but I was...I mean, as a PhD student, you kind of sometimes operate in this odd duality where you have



some [preconceived sense] of what it's like being staff because you do teach as well, and you can go to staff meetings, but, really, you're still PhD. I mean, that's a different thing, which is an interesting kind of hierarchy that...I see different institutions – I mean, Kent was a lot better at this. Now that [I'm in] different institutions, it's really horrible in a lot of institutions, how PhDs are treated. And then you...know your students – you're part of student life. I was part of the Student Union, em, officers and... And for Suhraiya to just...and a senior colleague to just kind of...you know, a lot of...you know, there are quite a few colleague seniors in Kent who, in certain ways, when it comes to certain kind of political situations, they...they don't put on the barrier of, you know, this is – “I only teach you – don't come to me with this”, which I have now experienced in like...being a staff member, looking at other colleagues do that to students. That wasn't [the way] with some people at Kent, and I think the most stark one was that Suhraiya was even more, from my perspective, active in having those conversations with students, and then having an open channel with students as well, regardless of whether or not you've been taught by them. And I think that was something that was very interesting to me, and when I kind of, later, came on board to the project, that was very much through those channels of, well, [...] politics [than] people [?] within...[I saw a] community [...], like a good two or three years, and their leadership as well – they're all very close friends. And so, having been invited to something like this, and there were some events that had happened that I'd gone to before that, and Suhraiya had invited Jason [Arge], who is right now the youngest professor in Cambridge – he's an amazing person, another person who was a big influence on me as well.

From my perspective, what I saw, which I try to now embody as well, as a staff member carrying out a similar project in Cardiff, is just [...] transparency, [just] shifting of how you look at the...the ethic of teaching and ethos of teaching as not just “a job”. I mean, of course, it's a job in a particular sense, but it's also an ethos. I mean, it's a huge responsibility and you're speaking to... And it becomes an even bigger responsibility when there are students of colour because of what they already face – and I know [laughing] because I was a student. I mean, I had gone through a lot of trauma as a Muslim student in Kent, and... having staff shift the way that they look at you really impacts you. It really does. It impacts how you see them. It suddenly kind of creates this sense of... Because I mean, HE is a very... to me, a mistrusting and suspicious place, as when I was a student, as a student of colour, and then more so now when I'm staff. And to then have staff members who treat you in a way to understand you as a whole person, which is very ironic and [an odd/horrible] thing to say, to be treated as a whole person, is...is really monumental, in a personal sense. It's quite monumental.

Kyra: Well, it seems to me as though kind of Kent already has this, or at least within your kind of...the school that you're both from anyway, has this kind of culture of partnership, in a way, so I guess that's easier for you to, I guess, try to practise partnership in your own kind of teaching and the ways that you engage with students. But a question I wanted to ask was:



what do you think are some of the major factors hindering more practices of partnership in the university?

Ahmed: If the question is that is this something that, in an institutional sense, universities should be fostering, to me, the very structure of a university, especially a Russell Group university, it's not possible. It's not possible because of the way that it defined – it sets those boundaries in a very jurisdictional...like I'm using a legal word, but it is, in my experience. I am this person. This is my office. This is what I do. I don't care about anything beyond this – what is my job description, and I don't want to do anything beyond it. And even when it can be within your job description, there are people who are not going to handle things that are sensitive like that, because who wants to? It's a hot potato – you just pass it over. [Who's] jurisdiction is it? Partnerships, one word is partnerships – I mean, there are probably, in a spiritual sense and in an ethical sense, we may come up with like other words and other ways to describe this, but, to me, it seems more...in the setting of an institution, you kind of both exist as an individual but you exist as a commodity as well. And then, to me, the idea of this partnership and this fluid kind of relationality with people and students of colour, which is based on empathy, and really kind of a genuine kind of love of trying to be of care and to be of service. It can't co-exist with being a commodity [laughing], it just can't. And that's a personal thing. I feel like people [want to] take us up on as kind of...you know, however they've described themselves, as renegades, as kind of, you know, rebellious people, as kind of cutting across and against institutional wellbeing within it, it's something that you do just personally, as part of an ethos. I mean, that's what I kind of believe now. I mean, there's some people who will be there for you; there will be a lot of people who won't be there for you because it's not in their job description to be there, in that sense, or to carry out that. But that's my kind of view, kind of coming from Kent to another institution, but...yeah...

Suhraiya: Yeah. Em...well, I've kind of...not to plug myself, but I've written about this very question in a piece that's called 'Equalising the University – Between a Rock and a Hard Place', and, you know, it can...it can feel very depressing, but I think it's also about finding the ways and the spaces in which you can...you can work. I mean, if we take a Decolonial Studies' approach, then we know that the university, as Ahmed says, you know, is founded on a...on a capitalist foundation, which is inherently racialised and classed and so on, and therefore will treat, you know, its staff and students as commodities. There's no getting away from the structure of what the university is, and that, since I went into academia, has only catalysed – it's like now on steroids compared to when I first entered academia, which actually, there seemed to be, at that point, more space. But, again, that's also about, you know, cash-flow and the fact that we weren't in the economic crisis, and that just squeezes everything even more. And, also, it depends on what perspective you're coming at it from because, you know, if you're coming at it from the perspective of – which, you know, I have time for and I think it's better than nothing – shall we engage with legal frameworks as well as good practice and, you know, stuff that's coming out from Advanced HE or the Office for



Students or things like the Race Equality Charter, all those institutional KPIs that universities are required to meet in order to kind of, you know, be benchmarked at a certain standard. So you can engage in those and I think, you know, that's fair enough – it's better than not having any of that. To what extent is it meaningful for students on the ground or staff on the ground...? You know, that...you have to put a big question-mark around that, and, you know, those kind of mechanisms within the neoliberal framework aren't for everyone. So, part of me has engaged in that, but that's not where my heart lies – and my heart lies with working with students in a more meaningful way. So, I've, you know, whilst I've been a part of those bigger, broader processes, it's because of our Decolonising the Curriculum project that the University is engaging on the Race Equality Charter, that we have a BAME Staff Network now, you know, and various other things, but I'm not working within those frameworks because, actually, for me right now, I think working around pedagogy and what teachers are actually talking about in their classrooms, how they're talking, how they're interacting with students, is actually a much more kind of frontline need. It's a need, right?

And, where staff are also feeling the pressures of being overworked, you know [laughing], not sufficiently enumerated, especially junior and staff on casual contracts, etc., em, that's where there's very little support. So, there's support at that kind of top level, but not really at that frontline teaching level, and so that's where I'm kind of working with...continue to work with students around actually what pedagogy, or what cases, because obviously we're in the discipline of Law, or what theoretical analysis to think about these cases, to think about reform, would make most sense to you in your context, and then disseminating that and sharing that good practice with colleagues. So, one of the things I have put together is a Towards Anti-Racist teaching resource for Law School teachers. I'm currently co-editing a book which is bringing the examples of good practice from different jurisdictions around teaching methods and reflective practice. So, we're not saying, "Hey, this is the answer!"; we're saying, "Look, this is what people are doing, this is what they're trying, this is what works, this is what still needs further work, in different areas of Law – you know, why don't you give it a go? You're not going to be perfect but, you know, that's okay, we can make mistakes – we need to do this together, support each other, and learn." And that is a massive cultural shift, like it's... It sounds like, you know, when I say it, it sounds like, "Yeah, you know, of course, why [wouldn't] people do that [laughing]?" but what I'm talking about is skills like moving mountains, you know. So, that's kind of where I'm at right now in terms of that's taking up all my time and energy, both from the research and education point of view, and keeping working with students, but also staff, and kind of work in a way that is not top-down but takes everyone, you know, as many people as possible, with you, those people who want to travel that path. I'm not taking people with me who don't want to travel that path, right, because there's no point. You can't force it. And that's the problem about it being institutionally enforced, is that it then becomes counterproductive and you get the kickback and you get all these kind of, you know, well, let's debate about... It becomes a freedom of speech dialogue kind of, you know, container for that, because we don't know how else to do these conversations outside of the Academy, right? So, actually, you know,



I've left that to one side, yeah, you lot carry on with that, and, in the meantime, you know [laughing], anyone who wants to travel this path and find, as I say, cracks and fissures – in my article, I talk about cracks and fissures – anyone who wants to find cracks and fissures and feels resourced enough to do a little bit and take a step here and share that good practice, then let's do it. So, again, it's kind of partnership in that way, but now kind of taking...trying to take more staff with us and...and engage students, you know, from different universities, so not just Kent.

Kyra: Mm, and I guess that becomes...like these conversations become all the more important when, you know, partnership is kind of scaling up and it is becoming more and more institutionalised and people want to kind of adopt it because, yeah, like the meaning of it just gets lost in kind of all these metrics and frameworks, and starts to become almost kind of extractive.

Suhraiya: Yeah, you get co-opted. I mean, let's not beat around the bush, right? We've all been there. And you have to...you have to choose and you have to anticipate like...actually, we know we can do this to a certain point, and we know then that, if we want institutional support, we're going to get co-opted and it's going to become something else. So, for example, the Decolonising the Curriculum project is mentioned in the Anti-Racism Strategy, but no one's decolonising the curriculum, right [laughing]?! So...no one even really knows what that means and...and it's not even something that's possible if you, you know, if you actually read what we've said about what...how people think about Decolonial Studies approaches – it's aspirational. It's not something that can actually exist within the current capitalist neoliberal context. So, even to use that language is a bit of a misnomer, in a way. We have to understand that we're using that as an aspirational...aspirational way of working rather than, you know, something that is a goal that can be achieved. So, if you're working in that way, then that's something you have to bear in mind in terms of the university. But you might...you might decide that, actually, you're going to take...an anti-racist approach, which, again, comes with a different kind of set of ways of working and so on. So, yeah, I think, you know, we definitely need to be... Everyone's far too fast to jump on these bandwagons, and, actually, sometimes we need to just stop and reflect and think and, you know, have spaces where we can discuss these things and take the time to take them on-board, and practise and make mistakes, have those container spaces, rather than just, you know, get excited about, "Oh, here comes the latest panacea to the attainment gap problem" or whatever problem it is that's cited in any given situation.

Kyra: So, I guess what you've just kind of like hinted at there is obviously...I wanted to ask about the foundations of our partnerships and what they need to kind of look like and be built on. How can we make space for partnerships and alliances that are genuine and long-term, and not just kind of representation or performative or short-term because they're only



kind of responding to a question and, yeah, people are just trying to kind of get to the finish-line, without actually sitting in their relationships and really doing that thinking and learning that needs to be done?

Suhraiya: Yeah, so we wrote a piece called ‘Trust, Courage & Silence’, didn’t we, Ahmed, so do you want to talk a bit about that?

Ahmed: Yeah. So, I think the piece, reflective piece, that we wrote initially I think we were [laughing] – [I remember I had this conversation] with Suhraiya after we presented this paper. At first, we really didn’t want to write a piece on it, and then we missed the deadline and [?] with the editor, [?] at Bristol – she’s also a really amazing mentor and [senior]. She insisted that she really, really wanted us to write something, and we instead thought of writing something on the project that we’d reflect on, well, what...what was there in place before, what was the preconditions in our kind of reflective [find] that could have possibly, we think, existed that allowed this to happen. I mean, really, looking back at the piece, in a real sense, I kind of...there are some parts of the piece that I really look at as like poetics – I mean, they’re...they’re essentially...it’s a very poetical way of kind of reflecting. It’s trying to take out the best bits of what we thought kind of thematically made sense, and one thing that...some of the things... A huge inspiration was Shirley Anne Tate, and Professor Shirley, em, kind of was...was really, in some ways, honoured at this [Leeds ?] workshop, the [?] workshop that Suhraiya and I were part of, including [...] anti-racist teachers and students and student movement leaders at this particular workshop, and Professor Shirley had kind of laid out this kind of acronym of things that are part of anti-racism, and we really took inspiration from there and kind of honed down to the first thing, which was trust. And that came directly from the idea of, well, [...] what is the institution, let’s just not kind of...make excuses over here and cut to the chase. It’s a plantation, it really is, it kind of works as a plantation industry. It sees its bodies in commodities still, in particular ways, and both staff and students, especially students, in a lot of cases. And so, it is no wonder that students just wouldn’t trust – why would they come here and trust something like that when it is kind of [imparting] that kind of violence? And so, in the first place, what you...what you need to remember is: how do you actually build trust? We’ve relied, in a very poetical sense, on a lot of our intellectual and spiritual...elders and leaders, kind of across decolonial theory, whether that was Fanon or [Gloria ?] or [Anne Sheriati] or the kind of tenets of CRT, like a lot of these different theoretical kind of frames and thinkers, Bell Hooks, that we felt like really inspired us to embody an ethic as teachers and as students and as learners to bring...kind of create a relationality where we think about a space of thriving for each other, built through ourselves.

And that requires a lot of - and that kind of builds into the next part of it, which is courage, which is incredibly difficult because it’s courage both in the face of that violence, so in that



plantation, but it's also courage to open up, courage to...to be yourselves, to kind of believe that we can empower each other in ourselves, and work through this...this kind of silence, and silencing, really, that the university does of us. And that silencing is, in a real kind of sociological, material sense, is very complex, and it's very... I see that as very malicious – now even more so – because it does it through co-optation, as Suhraiya said, through kind of...hollowing out the actual meaning and the intent of these things by further using students of colour and staff of colour's bodies, in a particular [...] sense, in our work and labour.

And...and then how do we find a way to re-exist within that, and then thrive within that, silencing environment? And, really, the end goal isn't for us to kind of create a space that's all of a sudden like...oh, we've kind of created a little like rainbow happy space. It's more like...something that continues to...to...that we continue to work through, and I guess kind of also be open to the idea that...that we can look within ourselves and continue to reflect, because I do think that there's an element [of it] which may be like coming out of...having to write that piece with Suhraiya, for me, it also kind of became more about, well, maybe there is a lot more sensitivity and ethos of making that space of re-existence that we need to continue to work on. And I suppose that particular thing is for staff and students who genuinely want to make that space of re-existence, is to then continually think of, em, how do we reflect even more of...how do we make this space that's trusting and relational and epic and genuine love, in kind of the way that Bell Hooks kind of describes it?

I mean, that, to me – I know that these are very kind of poetically vague answers, but...and I'm sure there's like elements of practice in there that we can think of, em, but [laughing]... but it is really that, it is that it's a bit poetic, you know, [the way] to think about how you create a space, because sometimes it's not really a physical space as well.

Suhraiya: Yeah. I think I would just add to that that, you know, we were actually lucky to have a physical space that was very [laughing], em, welcoming, and, you know, it was a space that I had control over, which was the Common Room in the Centre for Sexuality, Race & Gender Justice, and we had access to like, you know, a kitchen and.. Sometimes, we forget that actually the [growth] body needs...you know, has needs, and that actually, you know, as all our ancestors tell us, all our elders tell us, that we have to take care of ourselves and each other, and that we forget about actually that's part of the ingredients that we need, especially if you are living on a...effectively on some kind of formation of a planation, em, but that you need some of those resources and, em... So, I think, you know, my role was very much around supplying some of that and creating what we call the principle space, drawing on [Bach], building the antiracist collectives, work, you know, talk about "principle spaces" rather than "safe spaces", and articulating what those principles were so that everybody knew and it was transparent and, you know, that this wasn't a space that



everyone could come and just leak their stuff into, but, actually, you know, it was...it was... what was it for and what was it about, and we had a purpose, and, you know, if people wanted to feel the need to, em, disagree with the Decolonial Studies approach, well, they could do that, but not in that space [laughing]. You know, we could have that as a discursive space, sure, but not, you know, not... We had a specific purpose and we were there to fulfil that purpose. So, a container, I guess, is what I'm describing, a container that met various needs, and shifted power so that power was actually with the students to say, "This is what we need", and me as a kind of...me and a couple of other colleagues as...as navigators, guides, providers, you know, what was required – and challengers as well. So, you know, one of the key things is that students really wanted to call their project Decolonising the Curriculum project, and, you know, for me, it was like, "Are you sure you want to use the language of "decolonising", you know? Like this is the readings – let's discuss them. What about something else" you know, and so really challenging... And part of the process was research training before they went off and conducted focus groups, and thinking about what they would need for people that were going to take part in those focus groups, as well as for themselves, and what spaces work. So, some of them took place, as Ahmed will tell you, in the mosque and, you know, other spaces that felt...was there a space for students to come and pray or, you know, do what they needed in order to meet their, like I said, gross bodily needs, in a way that the...you know, the university or certain institution will not recognise because they don't see you as humans. You know, you don't...you don't cry, you don't go to the toilet, you don't need to eat – you're there to learn and that's it [laughing], you know?! And, actually, recognising those parts is just as important, I think, as preconditions that we... yeah, we really need places like universities to take on board much better. I mean, that is much more done in activist and grassroots organisational settings, in such beautiful ways, and we can take inspiration from that. But, certainly, the university needs, em, to address that more.

Ahmed: One of the things by practice I remember, now that Suhraiya's mentioned it, in the actual space was that a lot of us that were, for my part, involved in kind of then doing [out] the research and talking to our own communities because our own communities also trusted us because we are part of those communities [laughing]. And so, there were things said – it's all in the manifesto as well. I remember like some Muslim students at the mosque saying that, "You know, Ahmed, I wouldn't be comfortable saying some of these things if it wasn't you. If it was somebody else that just randomly came in to do some research, I wouldn't talk to them – like, okay, because you're a brother, you're at the mosque over here, I know you, that's why I'm telling you these things openly." And that kind of...conduit, and that kind of trust, and that kind of thing only happens when staff facilitators step out of these...little kind of boxes that are set in their job descriptions and actually look at the life of students beyond just coming into the classroom and sitting and them kind of [asking/ answering] a bunch of seminal questions to the entire [?]. And that's also another kind of limitation of this, trying to institutionalise this, because the institution has a very specific way of looking at student life, whereas students have a very specific way of looking at



student life [laughing], and I think when staff facilitators become facilitators within...within kind of when a space like that is created, and they kind of asked – I remember Suhraiya would ask us, in the groups, [certain] groups, said to the student, “So, do you want to open up this group for white students?” and [laughing] I remember one of her kind of students there, who’s really brilliant, and went on to do brilliant things, Anthony, he said, “No [laughing]”, [...] half a second later, and then she went on to ask everybody else and we were like, “No, we agree with Anthony, we don’t...we really don’t...we want this to be our space.” And then having the staff to be like, “Alright, okay,” you know, like...not kind of imposing their own [kind of] notions and... And really, this is kind of, in a lot of ways, institutions make it so hard and.. But, I mean, that was something that was possible because of staff facilitators like Suhraiya and...and some senior kind of allies, who kind of understood that that was needed.

Suhraiya: Yeah, can I just add? It’s really important to get food right [laughing]! If you get the wrong biscuits, you’re doomed! So, you need to do proper consultation on the food and the biscuits.

Kyra: Noted [laughing]! So, I guess, in both of your experiences, it’s obviously been, especially at Kent, like it was easy for you to kind of – well, not easy, but it was quite straightforward in terms of trying to kind of like develop those partnerships with students because they obviously came into the space kind of wanting to demand change and wanting to kind of – they already had that interest in kind of decolonisation and what it meant within higher education. What are some of the principles you, I guess, like to follow when building relationships with students who don’t necessarily have that interest already in these kind of topics and working towards kind of social justice? Yeah, how do you kind of approach kind of building partnerships that way?

Ahmed: So, for me, I think the first thing is, em, which I’m noticing now with some students – I mean, every student is at a different level and kind of...because decolonising means a very particular thing, and can mean a lot of things, and in the context of [?] can mean a lot of things, but really, what it really is about – and I’m thinking back to my time at the mosque, even before the project started – it’s just relating and empathising and talking at the most basic human level, and what they feel. And I remember, in one of the focus groups – this is, obviously, again, as I said, this is all in the manifesto, so I’m not saying something that’s kind of...not already out there as a form of publication – I remember walking into one of the focus groups and one of - who is still a friend – was at the focus group, and he...he was like, “You know, Ahmed, I don’t really know what to say...” And I was like, “Alright.” And then I started with my experience. I was like, “You know, guys, like I went to this place and I felt this way...” and my co kind of focus group leader was a student at the time, [was a] PhD, and he mentioned something that happened in his class, and then that student, that friend



of mine, who was at the focus group, he just kind of had this look on his face, and he was like, “You know, you’re right! Like now that you think about it, I dismiss the way that I’m often treated, and now I see that, like when you guys are sharing...” And it’s just that kind of environment of sharing and kind of opening up, in terms of vulnerability, that really is...that really connects to students in a lot of ways. I mean, even in Cardiff, there are students who kind of came to me and were like, “Ahmed, like I saw your email [to some of the Asian students] and like I’m super-interested but like it was a really long email and so I didn’t really go through all of it, but can you explain to me what it is?” And it kind of [laughing], kind of... in a very kind of like, eh, you know, [point...], oh, so this is what this is, and he was like...he said, “Yeah, you know, like I do feel like I really don’t feel supported over here. It kind of feels so unfair.” And I was like, “Great, so come to the group that we’re kind of going to be talking about this over here...” and he was like, “Yeah, I’ll come, I’ll definitely come.” So, sometimes it’s kind of...starting at the most basic level of just having a conversation [laughing] and empathy and kind of relation and experiences, common experiences that they can connect with.

Suhraiya: Yeah. I mean, I think, em, what Ahmed’s pointing to is like...a sense of embodiment as well, and, I mean, I’m...I’m quite lucky in that we have quite a big group of first-year cohort, so it can be anywhere up to like 650 – we’ve had nearly 700 students come in in a first year. I teach one of the core modules in that first year, so all our students will see me at some point giving lectures around areas of Public Law, where I talk about issues of coloniality and... So, they kind of get, you know, an immediate sense of who you are through your lecturing style, I think, and it’s quite interesting to see, you know, where a student sits [laughing]. As the term goes on, you kind of see all the students of colour really gathering around the front, like, you know, holding onto your sari, you know, sari bottoms, you know, that sort of...visceral connection, and you can read the comfort that people get from your presence and what you’re conveying. And then I teach my Race, Sexuality & Gender Justice module in the third year, so a lot of the students who have seen me in first year, you know, know what they’re going to get when they choose this as a potential optional module. And it’s a really big optional module because we get so many students wanting to come and do it. Yeah, so, in a sense, I don’t... I think my...it’s about living your own principles and, you know, what...and how you do that in your work, how you teach. You don’t need to necessarily have these explicit principles that you lay out that then facilitate student-staff partnership, or partnerships in general.

But, having said that, the project did actually, em, in order to work with others in the university and beyond, we did come up with a set of principles around self-awareness, you know, kind of very similar to antiracist work generally, and we worked with building the antiracist classroom in thinking about these principles. Things, you know, really basic things like active listening, not jumping in to wanting to kind of just put your view out there, but challenging yourself through active listening. And I had to do a lot of that when I was



facilitating the students, and it was so good for me, like I learnt so much from that process. As teachers, we're not...we're not really used to listening. We think the students should be the ones that are listening. So, you know, that can really turn something on its head for you in your identity as a teacher. It becomes so solidified, so ossified, that the simple act of listening, and not speaking, yet, you know, can...can really make a massive difference.

And then, also, thinking about active learning, and I say this constantly to colleagues, you know, we, as people within the learning industry, do not know how to learn [laughing]! We think we're beyond learning! We're in the learning industry, people! We need to also be learning – and it's not just that CPD kind of learning or lifelong learning, you know. This is actually active learning, like active listening, and it's not just something that is like obvious or straightforward. It's painful. It's a painful process. You know, I don't believe in the "No Pain, No Gain" thing, but, in this case [laughing], I think it's true, you know, in the sense of you have to experience discomfort, you have to get to that point where you think, ooh, this is feeling a bit uncomfortable...right, okay, let me look at that, let me be curious about it...can I stretch a little bit in there, can I breathe into it, what can I gain from that? If not, okay, fine, I'll step back a bit, I'll take care of myself, and I'll try again another day – fine! But, you know, that would be a really key principle, doing all those steps, which is how we've kind of visually...because we've got a poster of our principles and we've visually depicted them like that, as steps, em, but not in a linear way because we're constantly going around this path, right, so it's not a linear path, before we get to the point of acting. And I know, coming from an activist background myself, acting is really where it's at – that's the exciting bit, like, you know, where you're impatient, but, actually, as I've gotten older, and hopefully a bit wiser, em, yeah, let's not act immediately actually. Let's...let's think about these other steps first before acting, or in conjunction with at least, and be constantly walking that path.

Kyra: With that being said, am I okay to ask, what do both of you feel like you're still learning in this present moment?

Ahmed: I made a huge internal sigh there [laughing]. I'm still a young scholar, I have so much to learn, em, and yet... I mean, it's kind of...I don't want to take this into a slightly depressing note, but I recently kind of saw a post that Sophia [?], who's like such a brilliant scholar, and she was based in Portsmouth and then LSE, made a whole curriculum, Black British kind of Studies curriculum in LSE, was made redundant after she was hired to do so, and she's kind of left academia, and there's so many stories of young, especially black, scholars who kind of...[they're] young [laughing]. I mean, some of them are like about where I am or just a bit senior to me, are actually leaving because they're just getting burned out. So, one of the things that I'm still learning, and I'm not very good at it, but I think it's so crucial because my partner keeps telling me, "You need to really kind of try to get on this... reflect on this", is to be able to take care of myself and know when...which battles to pick



and which not to, and to find places and spaces and ways of reembodying my...my kind of peace, to heal. And I think, for someone like me, it's a bit of a problem because I just...I just believe in being of service in any place and situation that I am, and sometimes I forgot that being in service, in kind of a very spiritual Islamic way, also means being in service of your soul in yourself. And I kind of forget that part [laughing]. That's something I'm still like...if there's one thing that I'm learning, I think that's the one thing I'm still really learning to do for myself.

Suhraiya: Yeah, I would agree with that, and, you know, it kind of reflects the principles I just talked about as well, em, really understanding that it's a journey and that you have to... go to your points of stretch and be curious there and see what else you can learn, and that's going to be different in different situations. I think what I'm experimenting with right now is like...because I'm so used to being this kind of really action-oriented person, what does it mean to actually be still? What can be gained from stillness? Because stillness is an action; it's not...it's not nothing, right? And softness as well. And, actually, I'm learning I can gain a lot from that, actually [laughing], and I think that's maybe something...because it sounds quite tacky, but I think it is something that is commensurate with where I'm at in my age and stage of life, and realising that, actually, certain tactics don't work - like my instinctive tactics won't serve whatever it is that I'm trying to achieve. So, building range within my own toolbox of how I act... So, you know I've talked about learning about listening more actively and learning more actively, but part of that learning is also about what can I add to my toolbox that I don't have already - and there's loads, right? And acting...or staying still, and moving from place of stillness, bringing softness to things, you know, is something that is very much outside of my comfort zone but I'm finding is really, really...nourishing to myself and serving...still serving what it is that I want to achieve. And I think, in this...current climate, we need to embody more of that which we want to see. So, I'm experimenting with that as well - like if I embody that, if I practise that, then what does...what gets reflected back at me? I'm curious... So yeah! Who knows, I might write something about that [laughing], at some later point.

Kyra: I hope so!

Suhraiya: I don't know, I'm still in process, let's just say.

Kyra: So I just wanted to kind of bring it back to fostering decolonial spaces. As you've hinted in some of your responses already, like there's a lot of transformative potential in our partnerships when they're built and kind of nurtured in ethical and thoughtful ways. This has been kind of the thinking and theorising that you've both been doing together as well. What do you guys mean, I guess, when you say that, you know, we want to foster spaces of



continuing resistance through re-existence? And I guess, Ahmed, you kind of alluded to that previously, but I would really love to just kind of get an idea of what you mean.

Ahmed: I think I'm going to kind of speak to you what it means for me. I'm increasingly...I increasingly am starting to believe, and maybe this is context specific, it's certainly an opinion I'm holding of being an organiser and an activist, [activist assistant], in university spaces that, in a lot of instances, what...what we really are looking for is a space where we can just...we don't have to constantly, em, minimise ourselves, where we don't have to constantly feel traumatised, where we don't constantly have to feel that we're cutting ourselves into different pieces, that we can be whole as a person, and can find that in relation to our community and other people around them, whether that's a sense of solidarity, whether that's a sense of support, whether that's a sense of healing. That is a much more, to me, a kind of continuous process and maybe kind of, when it gets embodied is...when really it's working is...is a space where we can learn to thrive by just being ourselves [laughing]. It sounds really...it doesn't sound...sometimes, for some people, that might not sound like, you know, a lot, but it's actually quite a lot, given the context in which we kind of navigate the higher education space. So, for me, re-existence really means a space where I can just be [wonderful], I can be open, I can be honest, I can be myself, I can find laughter and joy and a sense of solidarity, spiritually, intellectually, politically, and...and sometimes also just learning things that I didn't realise, but learning in a way that's productive and constructive and healing, that tells me something about myself as well, and just how to be a better person, and how to be of service of others and to myself in a...in a more productive and constructive way, in a fulfilling way. So, I think that's...that's what it means to me. I can't tell you what it meant to me at that point when we wrote this [laughing], but at the moment, that is increasingly what it's beginning to mean for me, as I'm trying to...find that kind of space for myself [laughing] and others like myself in Cardiff.

Suhraiya: Yeah. I think that, you know, it very much speaks to what we did create with the Decolonising the Curriculum project, in having a space where we could come together where I could really facilitate students to...to do some research training, and to go off and, em, become researchers themselves and feel a sense of confidence that, actually, they were researchers, you know, that their skills that they can develop and learn and...and put into practice and then become authors of a manifesto, and then co-authors of a book, and presenters at conferences, and, you know, that this terrain is open to them, that they deserve to be on those platforms, they deserve to be at a lectern where they're speaking to the VCs and the Deputy Vice Chancellors about, you know, the research that they've conducted and put together, and that they can show themselves to be the eloquent people that they are, which really, you know, pushed a lot of our students outside of their comfort zones, of their conditioning, of their sense of self, and was really kind of...em...showing themselves, in a way – this was really about showing themselves and each other what they were capable of, given the conditions to free themselves of...of those kind of trolls of, you



know, inner self-critic, as well as outer self-critic, and given the opportunities to match...or to work through those.

So, that's about a space in which you can, you know, develop and then...perform who you are, because who you are is always performative. It's just about how genuine or authentic it is, right, to yourself, and there's not one monolithic you, there's different facets of you, so if you're not stretching into the different facets of your potentiality, how do you know who you are, other than what someone has told you or told you you should be? So, re-existence is about exploration of one's own potentiality, of going beyond what is our conditionality, or conditioning, and our, you know, what [B?] calls our fields of happy tasks, that which has formed us as we are now. And doing that in community as well, with people rooting for you, in solidarity, and with support behind you, so that, if you fall or if you wobble, you know, someone's going to be there and put their hand on your back and go, "You're good! Take a minute!" and then you'll be, you know, you could...get back to whatever it is that you're doing. And, as I said, that requires physical...physical spaces, and meeting physical needs as well. And it's an iterative process and it's something where, as we do it in community, we're all finding new parts of ourselves. So, it's...yeah, it's an iterative process, in the sense that it's constantly going. That's part of the learning, and that's what's so wonderful and liberating about it! Like if people could just see that, that that is really [laughing]...universities as a space, my goodness, if that's what we're doing in that university space, then, wow, like job done, you know, good job! And feel good about it, rather than this constant kind of sense of...you're not good enough if you don't get this kind of degree, or, you know, your employability, or you haven't got this on your CV, or whatever it is. It's about refashioning that.

And of course, not using the markers of modernity as it has formulated through the kind of colonial and neocolonial construction, and bringing other ways, so, you know, storytelling, em, from [neocolonial] studies methods, critical race theory methods – that's something that students really responded to – artwork, poetry work, you know. And, for a discipline like Law, that's like what [laughing]?! You know, that's beyond, you know, comprehensible, but, actually, it brings up so, so much from a deeper level that...that students, and staff, who were really moved by what they experienced, these students producing, em, and continue to do so, em, have experienced. So, yeah, it's re-existence in many different ways, I think. We've only just begun to kind of...touch the potentiality of that.

And then of course Covid happened, so that shut everything kind of down for quite a bit, so recovering from that, in terms of what we've created, and getting back to thinking how we can do that – and it's very different times, so different conditions to be able to explore that more, unfortunately.



Kyra: And I guess, just to respond to that, one of the things that I've been trying to kind of think through myself is how we can kind of do this work in the project, and obviously be kind of energised and guided by indigenous methodologies, black feminism methodologies, and I'm always kind of thinking about how.. I feel like there's a fine line between like... appropriating these kind of methods and approaches, and then, yeah, like being able to kind of like apply it to your context, and I wanted to ask, is that a kind of challenge that you've both kind of experienced, and have you kind of thought about how you approach that yourselves?

Suhraiya: I mean, in our group, we were really lucky that students were from different backgrounds and experiences and really brought, you know, parts of themselves to the project, and then put them in dialogue with stuff that we were reading and really kind of thinking that through. So, you see that in the manifesto, but, in particular, you see that in the book, where students' contributions are reflecting on their research process. And I think, for me, the most important thing is that you're respectful to whatever literature you're drawing from or you're reading, and that you're understanding the context in which it's coming, and that you're not just kind of...appropriating it or using it like salt and pepper to sprinkle on something, you know, to make it more flavoursome and...and that's it. You know, actually understand and be...be respectful, and I think, you know, when you're...when you're working in this way, students generally are because they're so curious and hungry for this kind of inspiration, that actually students are respectful, much more so in a way than I've seen in many, you know, research papers or whatever from...from my peers in terms of, you know, academics. So, yeah, I think...it's not something that I needed to feel worried about because we were constantly talking about ethical practices anyway with the students. It's something that I'd feel more concerned about actually working with staff, colleagues.

Ahmed: Yeah. I think I would kind of...echo that sentiment as well, in the sense that, I mean, for me, increasingly even now so, black radical, critical indigenous thought, and even a bit of...which I'm increasingly trying to think more so, and have in the last few years, critical Islamic kind of liberation theology, it...I kind of always, especially critical indigenous and black radical thought, to me, has always been grounded in actual action, in actual materiality, and that's where it emerges from. And, as an academic – so, for me, there are two things. As an academic, there's always the danger that I'm going to utilise that in order to kind of...advance myself in a career, or kind of appear to be doing that, or actually not kind of responding to what is...where is it that it actually emerges from, and what is the ethics of where it emerges from, and what it's trying to do. With a lot of these intellectuals, I tried to rely on, not all, but some of them, are folks who've done actual work. I mean, I met Linda, and I asked her about her strategy [in her] university and kind of how [do you] respond to university and how do you respond to just kind of challenge of institutions, and her response was so interesting. This is a theorist who's written on methodology. So, it's like, well, you consider it like a war, and there are various battles in a war, and everybody is a



potential ally. And I was like, oh my god, that's like a very interesting kind of way to look at this. I mean, she's thinking about it as a tactician [laughing] – she's an academic, but she's thinking of it as a tactician, and I kind of try to always think, as long as I am, and students, sometimes, when you, as Suhraiya said, rightly so, in these contexts, when they're exposed to these theories, automatically in that context, they [will] try to think about it in that sense. It also validates a lot of their thoughts, and that's the important part. It validates their lived experience immediately as a form of kind of...epistemological authority, and they're like, "Ah, okay, so my experience is valid and it can be used to say these things, and people [can't] question me, and these theorists have said that, you know, and I'm going to rely on them" - and a lot of those theorists kind of use that as a form of tactics, strategy, to organise, to act. And I think as long as...as long as, for me, I am convinced [he's] trying to do that, em, I kind of...am...I kind of believe that, well, I am actually kind of...I'm not kind of co-opting this. But, at the same time, I'm also very [laughing], [as/at] a particular point, "Am I co-oping this?!" I think the tension and that kind of sense of hesitance should always be there because I think that's part of it. I think it's part of continuously reflecting on, hey, like am I doing this wrong...you know? And I think there's nothing wrong with sometimes doubting yourself and hesitating, in those respects.

Suhraiya: Yeah, and I would add that, actually. It's essential to do that, to actually doubt yourself, I mean, and... You know...I don't want to say that too strongly because I know certain people will go...you know, go to town on that, and they're not the people that should be doubting themselves in quite the same way [laughing], so, you know, I'm putting kind of conditions around that. But, yeah, just, you know, that is part of reflective praxis, right? That is what is what we're doing here in academia, and so that should be part of the process anyway, but not to the point of stopping those who...there's resonance with going, you know, and writing and putting their...I was going to say "pen to paper" because I'm old, fingers to keyboard and just, you know, getting thoughts down or action or just...having space. That's what reading groups are for, that's what, you know, masterclasses are for, that's...you have those discussions, hopefully in a principled way, so that you can work through these difficult questions.

Kyra: Thank you. So, unfortunately, we're coming to the end of our talk. I feel like I could be in conversation with you guys forever! But, as a question I'd like to end on, what is something you'd like to see happen or see develop within higher education in, let's say, the next 10 years?

Ahmed: I'm going to, since Suhraiya is waiting for me to answer this one [laughing]...! It's a really big question. To be honest, I think it's also an important question and a sense of just... a practice of imagination, which I think we should all kind of do. And so, I mean, I would really like universities to reckon and recognise that they [are a] business and how not to be a



business. I mean, I am talking about some monumental imagination over here. I am talking about universities imagining themselves as part of a community, and being a community service, and what are the ethics of that, and that doesn't include making tons of money - that doesn't those things. I know this is not realistic or practical, in the kind of...I mean, kind of my PhD researcher [...] those things around nation state and governance and capital economies, but, em, I think...as soon as the university space itself transforms in its core identity, that would be something that would really be...kind of automatically change so many things. It will automatically change so many things, em, if it turns into an actual community [?] service that we're nurturing young people and [...], you know, this is about knowledge and this is about care and this is about those things. This is not about, you know, these constructed ideas of a good student, of like a good teacher, and kind of providing a service and all of those things, yeah.

Suhraiya: Yeah. I'd like to see everything that the students put together in the manifesto [laughing] because there was recommendations in there, and really good ones, and, you know, some things have, em, taken place, like thinking about how we can support undergraduate students of colour into postgraduate studies, thinking about, you know, unblocking that pipeline. So, you know, there are things that have begun that [are of thought] that really need, em, continual support because we can't take those things for granted. What I'd really love to see is some, you know, some leadership, some really strong leadership, em, at a national level, at university level, that gets it, you know, that really understands, and can just make or shift small cultural aspects, because I don't think we are ever going to, you know, move out of the business model in my lifetime – I might be wrong, but I think that's where it's at. But I do think that there are still ways that that can be softened and...kinder. And one of things that would be really amazing would be to have that leadership that really could make some significant, small but significant, changes.

And, you know, things like they have in the US, where they have...I know from a colleague who works in Berk, em, that they had, em... I can't remember what they called it but it's basically a space where students of colour can go to, whether it's to get information, whether it's to get support, but it's dedicated and staffed and resourced by people of colour, rather than some kind of generic wellbeing or some kind of generic reporting of harassment mechanism at the university, which students just do not feel secure and safe and confident to use. And, for me, that would make such a massive difference because, at the moment, they're just using unofficial channels, and there's very little you can do to support them, and it breaks my heart to see students go through very tough things that can actually be supported but are not.

You know, even like this week, we were...or last week, rather, I was teaching the topic of sexual violence, and it's really heartbreaking to see how there's so little education for first-



years when they come into universities around how to stay safe and, you know, what is acceptable and what is not acceptable and what you can do to keep yourself – you know, these are basic things that we’re not providing, basic, practical things. And yes, they’re adults, but that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t be providing, you know, wellbeing in that sense, but in a way that’s actually accessible. So, I think, if I was going to...narrow it down to one word, there would be something about culturally appropriate accessibility. That’s three words, but “accessibility” was the one word [laughing]!

Kyra: Ahmed, Suhraiya, I just want to thank you so much for joining me here today. It’s been such a pleasure to just hear you speak about your journeys into higher education and how you both have engaged with student-staff partnership to do kind of decolonial work in the university. You really inspire us on the project, so I’m grateful to be able to kind of share this interaction with our listeners. But yeah, thank you so much again.

Suhraiya: Oh, thank you, Kyra, and all the best of luck with it. It’s hard but it’s definitely worth it.

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