University of Westminster - Pedagogies for Social Justice Podcast
Episode 32: Drea Asibey
Transcribed by www.premiertyping.com

To cite this podcast:
Asibey, D., Araneta, K.). (2023, February 7). The Black experience at PWIs, student organising and youth activism (No. 32). [Audio Podcast Episode]. In *Pedagogies for Social Justice*. University of Westminster. https://blog.westminster.ac.uk/psj/tools/podcast/ DOI: https://doi.org/10.34737/w8384

Podcast transcript:
Kyra: Hi everyone, welcome to the podcast. For this episode, we have the pleasure of being in conversation with Drea Asibey, a cultural creator, producer and educator based in London. In the episode, we discuss Drea's academic background, in particular the experience of being Black in predominantly white institutions in the UK and the land we now call Canada. Drea also shares some insight into her time at the National Union of Students on the Decolonise Education Campaign, before opening up about how we can empower young people to participate in political activism. How are you doing this week?

Drea: I mean, thank you for having me. I'm doing okay this week. It's been one of those weeks where there's been like a few ups and downs, but like we're here, we're trying to thrive, we're trying to thrive, so yeah, not doing too bad!

Kyra: So, I like to start things off with our guest just telling us a little bit about themselves, so, first things first, where did you grow up and where are you currently?

Drea: Okay. So, I grew up in a couple of different places. I was born in the UK, but my dad was living in Kenya at the time because he had a job, so then I went to Kenya for a bit, but because I was a baby, my mum – like both my parents have Ghanian heritage, are from Ghana. I spent a lot of time in Ghana with my grandma because that's where she lived. And then came back to Kenya obviously, did kindergarten there, and when I was six and a half, we moved to Trinidad as a family, which was quite nice. I think it's like…as a child, like a lot of really great memories living in Trinidad. And then my parents split up and then my mum moved back to the UK and then my dad moved to the States, so I spent time in both places, and then mainly lived in London as a teenager, and then, when I was 18, I decided to go to uni abroad, so I lived in Montreal, Canada, for four years. Currently, I'm back in London, or Babylon, whatever people want to call it [laughing], but yeah, I'm based in the UK now, hopefully for not too much longer, but yeah…

Kyra: We'll see! But that's really interesting, like just the idea of like how you've kind of got to experience growing up in so many different kind of contexts. One of the questions that I like to ask our guests is: how would you describe your upbringing in terms of how race was seen and felt in your household?

Drea: Mm, that's a good question. So like until I moved to the UK, I would say I grew up in majority Black countries, like living in Kenya and Trinidad, but then again something…with like a bit of hindsight looking back, there's still a lot of like dynamics, like I'm a [?] Black woman so there was a bit of colourism, em, living in Trinidad as someone like who…who's like West African. There was like a bit of tension there sometimes, which is totally understandable, but like it wasn't just like smooth just because I was around Black people all the time. Also, a country like Trinidad, where…where a lot of like…if you go to like certain types of schools, it's still made up of a lot of children who are like not Black so like people from like Europe or like Western Asia and North Africa and things like that, so like, in that context, could be defined as racialised as white, like there was so many dynamics. But I would say it was really…like it was great because like I was able to see myself be seen in certain ways, like when I was like hanging out, there were a lot of people who looked like me. I never necessarily felt like I didn't belong because there were a lot of people who looked like me, but obviously there were like instances where like, because of my shade, like I was called certain names or like, because I was African, you're called certain names or like not deemed to be intelligent or whatever, backwards, em, mentalities, like European colonialism created, em, the narratives it created about the continent. But like, yeah, it was really interesting because, obviously, like growing up, it's like I was…I knew I was like Ghanian. Even though I was born in the UK, my mum was like, "You're from Ghana" [laughing] so that was the context. I knew that, obviously, like people were like different colours, for lack of a better word, as a child.

But when it comes to race, I would say that it was…my eyes like really opened when I moved to the UK and I was living with my mum because, obviously, there's like a huge South Asian community in Trinidad and like…it's [like vibes], you know, and then moving to the UK and moving to North West London, it wasn't necessarily the same and that's when I started like noticing like…or I was starting to be socialised in a way where I was associating my skin colour with like certain things. The one thing I'm grateful for is that…one thing my mum did always try and instil in me – obviously, there are caveats because my mum was of a certain generation, but was that "Black is beautiful", so that's something that I really…wanted to like stick with me as I was growing up. But I remember like…I was thinking about this, like growing up, I used to watch 'Everybody Hates Chris"', and then there's this one scene where they get a dog [laughing] and they call the dog Blackie but the dog is brown, and then Drew, who is like the younger brother, is like, "Dad, why is the dog called Blackie?" and the dad is like, "Drew, well, you're brown but you're Black". It was like a really interesting thing about colour and race and like all that stuff, so that also made me think because like, even though like my shade is like quite dark, like I'm…like I'm mahogany, do you know what I mean, like I'm not like Black, so like where did Black and blackness come from? And I would say it really wasn't until I was like 16 – it took a while.

I also went to like boarding school [laughing], which was an experience, surrounded by a lot of wealthy white people, but it was only when I was 16 when I really started like thinking critically about things because… Also, the way the race is spoken about, if you're like of a marginalised race, it's like…your skin colour is inflicting this violence upon you rather than looking at systems that, because you are a certain shade, they will treat you as such. These things don't happen to you because you're a certain shade, like…and that's something I started realising, like as I was in sixth form and going to university. Also, learning that like race is not like a fixed biological category, if that makes sense? It's very much like, you know, a societal and like…it's a system that was created, essentially, with like whiteness at the top and blackness at the bottom, and depending on where you are in the world, the system like looks different.

I'll add something more about how it was seen in my household. So, my grandpa was a very fair man and, according to history, like his mum was like mixed race or something, and like, even though, as I mentioned, like colourism is like such a big thing so like…and that's…there are so many layers to this because, even though like my mum was like, "Oh, be proud to be African and Black" and all that stuff, like I just remember that there were some comments where it would be like, "Oh my gosh, why didn't you wash your face properly today?" and I'm like no, like [half-laughing]…this is just my shade, this is just my skin colour. So like all these were like interesting like dynamics, like…even like certain family members would make comments or like, "You look bright today" or like recommend certain creams, if you know what I'm saying, or like do this and do that, which wasn't great. But, overall, I would say that like…I was aware that like I was different, even though I grew up like Black majority countries until I moved here, but it was only here where I started realising that, just because you looked a certain way, people would treat you…like differently, if that makes sense. Because, when you're young, you're just like, "These people are mean" but as you grow older, it's like there's certain…or like you'd have friends come over to your house and they'd be like, "Oh, like you live like this…" or like, em… School was the biggest one, where like obviously, like parents of a certain generation, like "Put your head down and study" and I'm like, "I'm doing that but they're still picking on me." So [laughing]…like what is true here, you know what I'm saying? So, yeah, I think, growing up, like race was something that was very complicated and I didn't fully – obviously, like many young people, like I didn't really know what was going on. I just knew that like…I had like really deep dark skin and then, depending on the day [laughs], it was really good or it was like…or it was like your skin could be lighter or, for other people, it's like, "Oh, what a shame…" [laughing], like this is your skin tone because you are like XYZ things. So yeah…

Kyra: And just how confusing that is as well…like when you're already like so young, trying to kind of like navigate life and your own kind of racial identity… Like I think…my experience was a bit…was a bit similar but I would say it differed in the sense that…obviously, I'm mixed race, I'm half-Zambian, half-Filipino, and there were times where I do remember kind of

being in a room with like, you know, old Filipino aunties and they were, "Oh, you're so lucky, you look so Filipino!" you know, and it's like…

Drea: Yeah.

Kyra: …I don't know how to take that… And I think, when you're so young, like it's something where…I mean, if you're kind of woke enough, let's say, those kind of things do make you feel uncomfortable, but I think, at that time, my own kind of like understanding of race, it wasn't quite there yet, and I think, for me, it was just something that I took as normal, and it's like hard now kind of thinking about how it takes so much time later on in life for you to really kind of unlearn those like really harmful kind of ways of thinking.

Drea: 100%! Like…like it's so true, and I think the thing that sometimes I think about the most, which is [tough, is the way like] white supremacy works, because, oftentimes, the things that I've internalised have come from other Black people or people who are people of colour rather than like white people, and it's just like really fascinating. And I agree with you, like it takes a lot to like unlearn, especially like if you're…if you're someone who's like a fem or like, em, woman where like [there are these beauty ideals] that ideally you have to like try – well, not…you don't have to fit into anything, but society tells you like, in order to be beautiful, it's these things, or like, even recently, I mean, this article, I feel like they recycle it every three months, like "The most beautiful woman in the world…" and then it's like...I think, most recently, it was like Bella Hadid, but it's someone with like white skin, like a slim nose, certain eyes, like taut skin, like all these things that like, as an African dark-skinned woman, like I'm not going to fit into that, and yeah, it's just like really… It's been interesting to navigate, and, as you said, like unlearn certain things and like…yeah [laughing]…

Kyra: So, just linking back to the kind of…how you went about in school and kind of like…you said that you were at a private school, like where was the private school located – was that in the UK or was that…?

Drea: I went to boarding school, which was in the UK, so my secondary education, like 11 to 18, I was at boarding school in Surrey, which is…everyone, like when you say Surrey, people think of like wealthy white people and that's exactly [it] [laughing]. What it was, em…and, yeah, like I went as a young 11-year-old, like, you know, like fresh, really impressionable, and it was really interesting because…I mean, there were a few other like Black folk there. I think, in like my year, there were like three…three other Black girls and like one Black boy. And it was just interesting because, again, I always liken it back to white supremacy. I'm not putting blame on individuals and stuff. But it's always this notion that there's not enough space, so

there can only be like good one negro [laughing], for like a better word, so it's like [when] we should be banding together and being community. There were these like weird tensions sometimes where like everyone wanted to [be like] that Black person, em, and it was quite sad. But like, I was there for seven years and I feel like I had a lot of growth in that time, and, as I mentioned, it was sixth form, where like we had like an influx of like international students who came from Nigeria and, for the first time in like that school, I felt like seen in another way, where like I was actually like becoming myself and I could talk about certain things and people wouldn't think I'm weird, or I'd listen to like certain music and just like feel like…like…at ease in myself and really start like thinking…I don't know, I guess like…because, as you said, when you're young, like sometimes you're not really thinking about these things, and I feel like it was only when they came, like with hindsight, I was looking back and I was like, wow, like these people really…like they're really racist, like speaking like em… So, as I mentioned, like I'm from Ghana, I speak [Twi], like speaking [Twi] with like someone else in the school who also speaks that language and being told like, "Why are you speaking gibberish?" or like, "What are you speaking?" Meanwhile, we have like international students from like Italy and France and they're just free and speaking their own languages and no one's thinking anything of it. Or like braids – like the white girls could dye their hair red over the weekend, or blonde, which is not their natural hair colour, but I come in with like colour 30…30…30…I think that's a brownish-maroonish mix…

Kyra: I was going say, that's not even like a vibrant colour or anything…

Drea: Not vibrant at all. You can only even see it when the sun is shining. It's like subtle because you want to [mix it up]. And then they try like send you home to like change your hair. I'm…I was that person, like…I was like, "If you want me to go home, you're going to pay for my train ticket, you're going to pay for my hair to get taken out and put back in," and I never went home. Some people did but… There were a few things, looking back, and I was like, wow, like subjected to like so much violence and like catching up with like other Black students now that were like…it's been like seven years since like I've been in that school, em, we're just like kind of… I don't know, there's a lot of trauma there. Like I had lunch with a friend on Monday and we were just saying like, wow, like we really went through it, like it's kind of sad to think that, back then, like we knew it wasn't right, but now we were like, wow, that was really, really violent. So like all those things were like really interesting, and they like planted seeds in me to start like reading more and doing more research about like…like what is this, like why do people act this way, you know what I mean, towards like certain groups? And I just thought like it wasn't…it just…it wasn't right because like no one should be made to feel "other", you know?

Kyra: Absolutely. Thank you. And could you maybe just give us like a bit of a breakdown of your educational journey, so after your A Levels…?

Drea: So, actually, I didn't do A Levels. I did the International Baccalaureate, IB, which is a regret of mine. It's like so unnecessarily hard. I don't [like it]. So, my school became like an all IB school and it's…it helps people like…like apply to universities abroad, if they wanted to. So, like I did like Higher Latin, Economics, and…Higher Latin, Economics, and French, and then – because you do like six subjects and then like you have this thing called [Theory of] Knowledge, which I can't even tell you what it is now [laughing]!

Kyra: Yeah, that sounds really intense. I was already struggling here like doing four A Levels!

Drea: It's a lot. And then you have to do like Maths, English, and a Science as well. It's kind of like GCSE but a bit…just less subjects. So, I did that, and then… So, when I went to school, I [started] Latin and I…like my grandma is Catholic so I knew a bit about Latin. You kind of read a bit about the Romans. But when I started doing like Latin language and learning it, I was like, wow, this is kind of cool, and then I also found out I was like pretty good at it, so, for university, I applied to do Classics, and then I ended up… I knew I didn't want to stay in this country [laughing]. For some reason, I was like my spirit, my spirit doesn't want to be here, even though I applied to unis here. The States was an option, but then it was like too expensive, and it was 2014, at the start of like Black Lives Matter, and although I do have family in the States and I've visited a lot and like my dad used to live there and I've been there for like long periods of time, I was like, mm…maybe like I don't want to be in that environment.

So, I ended up in Canada, at McGill University, and I was studying Classics, and I just remember like walking into my first class, which was like Intermediate Latin, and feeling so out of place. I think, obviously, in school, like…in like my Latin class, I had my homey, another Black kid, Jeremy, and like we were studying Latin together, and Leone as well, so like I was very used to…it was normal for me for like Black people to study Latin. Members of my family, like some are like Catholic priests, some just like also studied like Latin and Greek and like classical languages because they went to a colonial school in Ghana [laughing] and that's what they did. But to like go to this university and like enter a class and like…not only did no one look like me, people didn't like expect me to be in the room, like I wasn't welcomed into the room like other people were, and that was like really tough. And I took other Classics courses and I just felt like I had no idea what people were talking about. Obviously, when you study Latin Language, like, em…it's very much like focused on the language, so like I… I'll be honest, I never [gave] much thought to like…like throughout studying Latin, I was just like, okay, yeah, the Romans were like olive-skinned people, do you know what I mean, and it was only when I got to university and I started reading more, I was like, no, like this is higher education, like let's really talk about like…you know, like trade and exchanges and cultural exchanges and like how, you know, if the empire extended onto the African continent, like

what does that mean for people, you know? And that just wasn't spoken about or it was shut down and like people…[like make the joke that] Classics is very much a white supremist man's game, and that's what I experienced at uni. Like I remember even walking into a class and the teacher was like, "I don't think you have the right room" and I was like, "Ah, yeah, yes I do!" like I am meant to be here, I'm trying to take up space, I'm trying to do my best.

But, em, one thing I think that helped me balance it out a bit, even though it wasn't perfect, was, em, when you go to school in North America, you have to take at least two different subjects, so the university was prompting me to pick like a minor or another major, and then I was like, oh, like there's African Studies, and I was like, "Oh, what is that?" like let me have a look, and, according to McGill, they're like the first university in Canada to have an African Studies like programme. So, I went [into] African Studies and it was taught by the strangest white man I have ever encountered in my whole entire life but it was also the first class I had at that university where there were so many Black people, and even though like the professor, out of…out of his…out of his goddamn mind, excuse me, if I can swear on this podcast, but like it was actually really good to be introduced to like certain literature, which I was even surprised that was on the syllabus. So, that…like it was like my second semester of uni, I was feeling really defeated after [laughing] like doing a semester of Classics, and like getting average grades, you know? I don't know if people feel this, like you go…for certain people, it's like you're doing really well in like high school, and you go to uni and it's like, oh wow, like am I…am I intelligent, am I smart…? But then like, taking this course, I…the first time I read a discourse on colonialism by Aimé Césaire, and when I tell you that radicalised me! I'm going to say, that's the beginning of when I was like…woah…does this mean…? I think [it was the basketball player] of the Black man where he's like…

Kyra: I know what you're talking about, yeah [laughing].

Drea: Oh yeah. That was me. Like I just remember like reading this and…again, because…I think that, as…as young people or like when you're a child, we experience and feel so many things, but then we aren't…we haven't developed the language to like articulate it well or put it into words, and like reading 'Discourse on Colonialism' by Aimé Césaire, learning about things like Négritude, introduced me to like solidarity. I'd heard the phrase "white supremacy" before, but the way it's spoken about, it's like a few select people who just don't like anyone apart from themselves. But then I started learning about systems and structures. Like having like my family being from Ghana, like I knew about colonialism, but I didn't know to the extent in which it had ruined the country, like…the Global South [laughing], not just the African continent but the Global South, like kind of learning how like countries…like the UK, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, how they were formed and how they've built their wealth and things like that, em…really like radicalised me. Learning about like World War II, and like Aimé Césaire has this theory called like Hitler's [?], and like always

wondering it's like…there are so many people who are nice but are still racist, and, for me, I don't like the concept of niceness, and seeing him explain that literally like – in his book, his whole premise is like Black lives don't matter, like these people literally appeased like such a brutal, horrible person until it started to affect them and then they enacted upon it because it looked bad because they were the West, but they were exported their violence to colonies and no one thought to think anything – like Germany committed the first genocide of the 20th Century and that's not spoken about, do you know what I mean? And it makes me think about…the way Blackness is thought or spoken about in our society and…there's…like a lot of people actually don't care… Like I think about [laughing] what it means to be a human, right, and the way a lot of people have been socialised is that Black people are not human, do you know what I mean, they don't have certain feelings, they like certain things, and like opening, em, reading Aimé Césaire actually like really opened me up to that.

And then, another book that I loved was…and I was introduced to Binyavanga Wainaina…I don't want to say his name wrong. Unfortunately, he like passed away a few years ago, but he was a really great Kenyan writer. He was a gay Kenyan man and he wrote this satirical piece for a magazine called Grata called 'How not to write about Africa', and in it, it's very satirical, it's like you talk about, you know, the sprawling savannahs and the sunsets and, you know, the Black people in their loincloths and things like that, and that also…brought my attention to language and how language is a form of violence, even when you don't think about it, because of the way people like speak about like…you know, like Black and People of Colour, Indigenous people, the way people write about us, all these subtleties that, like looking back at some of the literature I would read as a child, I'm like, wow, like [laughing] wow, they really…! And, for them, it was just normal because it's how people have been socialised, right, to view certain people in a certain light.

But yeah, so that's like my education and undergrad. I kept taking some classes. I had a few clashes with professors because, again, just because you're studying in a department like African Studies doesn't mean that like racism and coloniality isn't present. And…it was tough, like I'm going to…like I was grateful because there were a lot of Black people in those classes and we had each other, and I also discovered community, but like, at the same time, it was just like, wow, so there really is no safe space in a university – and I'm sure we'll talk about that later.

And then something I'll add onto in terms of my educational journey is in…last year…2021, actually, I started a Master's called Black Humanities at the University of Bristol, and it's been a very interesting journey. As I said, there's no safe space [laughing] in any university, regardless of the name of the course or what the course aims to do, and I've actually been quite disappointed with the course because I was like I'm going to go and meet likeminded people – because I didn't do my university here, like I'd heard about Bristol, but then again,

because of the work they said they were doing [laughing] around their links to the Transatlantic slave-trade and things like that, I thought that this course would be like…you know what, like it's still an institution, I'm not expecting the institution to be like extremely radical or to love me back, but I just thought there'd be like some…some basic…some basic… some basic things that like weren't there in terms of…or felt like a lot of extraction [abstraction?] – like as a Black person, why am I explaining myself in a seminar [laughing] when we're talking about Black people? White people don't have to do the same thing. They don't have to draw from and explain themselves and outline things, and that really frustrated me. So, I'm taking a break from that, but I will return.

But, yeah, that's just a bit about my educational journey…

Kyra: Thank you. And I think that, just your last point as well, like that just goes to show how, you know, you can look at a module handbook or something before you've started the course and it could say like it's going to do all the right things, but then you can get into the class and it just be…full of violence and, yeah, like you said, like not a safe space at all. And just thinking back to how you were studying Classics and African Studies, was…there must have been such a big tension between like being able to kind of like…have those conversations about race in the African Studies classroom and then going back to your Classics classroom and feeling like…I can't say these things. Did you experience that kind of tension, and I guess, how were you able to really like handle that?

Drea: You know what, that's such a great question because I found the tension so hard, and the way I handled it was I stopped going to my Classics classes, like I…I can't even like say like, oh, I was trying to do this and do that – like I would just miss like a lot of class, and I would keep quiet and I would just keep my head down and try to work, which like isn't great. But there was one moment actually… So, there was another person…there was…we weren't in the same year but she was like a person of colour and she…I think she became the President of the Classics Association, so she was trying a lot…to like bring a bit more like diversity and like diversify stuff. And at the…I don't remember what it was, it was like a wine and cheese, but she invited Emily Greenwood, who I will never forget.

She is a Professor of Classics at Princeton…is it Princeton or Yale, either one, an Ivy League in the Eastern Coast of the United States [laughing], and she came and she gave a talk about Classics in the Black Atlantic, and when I tell you I had tears in my eyes the whole time because it was… And this happened in my last year, [and like] I had decided not to take any Classics courses – I changed the type of degree I was going to do. And it was the first time I'd felt seen in the entirety of the course because she literally was just talking about how…you know, first and foremost, Classics is not a white discipline. It is actually dishonest and very

white supremist to, you know, portray it as such, and I could see some of the professors squirming! And she was talking about literature traditions in the Caribbean and how they were like…like massively influenced by Classics. She spoke about…I've forgotten his name but it begins with a T, like a Roman playwright who was obviously like someone of African descent, and like how…like there are so many avenues to talk about like blackness and like other cultures within like the world of Classics, and that's not happening and like… And she was talking about how like it's so dangerous how white people are so adamant to see themselves in everything, they kind of like ruin it for everyone, and she gave the example of…Heinrich Schliemann – I think he was the guy who like dug up Troy – when he saw…like they dug up a statue and he said – oh no, maybe it wasn't Heinrich…like Schliemann did Troy but someone else was… This was in Athens and I think they found like a statue who they believed to be the God Apollo, who's like this young god, and the guy said something like, "Wow, like I saw his tresses and I saw myself in his face" and Emily Greenwood was like, "No!" Like this whole fantasy and imagination, like who are you to try and insert yourself into a narrative? And like a professor asked a question, something along the lines of like, "Well then, how do we like imagine…?" and then she was just like, "But that's the problem, like you can imagine without inserting yourself in the narrative, like who is to say that like this person didn't have like brown skin or mahogany skin?" and all that stuff.

So, with the tension, I just stopped going to class and then…but I just brought up that event because there are people out there, even now, like [there's] Classics [of colour] – like I feel like if I'd gone to university now and studied Classics, it would be like a whole different thing, but there are people out there doing like great work who are like marrying so many traditions and actually excavating Classics for what it is, like it's a very… It's like a long period of history. It is like…so many different people were coming together. These empires were expansive, you know what I mean, from like Eastern Asia to like the African continent and like it's just not just like white Europeans, do you know what I mean? So, yeah, it was tough, but […] I can't say I was [fighting for power in class] and like speaking up – I just [laughing]…I left the space! I just left the space!

[Music]

Kyra: So, on the podcast, we've had a lot of guests come from like activist backgrounds, you know, whether that's organising in their universities or organised within their local communities, and I also know that you have a background in kind of activism. So, where did your journey into organising and activism outside the university start?

Drea: Outside the university? Okay, that's a good question. So, I would say like two things… I mean, to be very frank, like when I finished uni, I was so burnt out and depressed like I was

like non-functioning for like seven months like I would say, and then… So, like my day job is I work in a museum and then I would say like my activism started again outside of university there because, em, I wrote my thesis on the repatriation of like African artefacts, stolen African artefacts and objects, and then I wanted to work in museums because they are actually such powerful [buildings/beings] of education but they're doing it in the wrong way [laughing]. And I was like, if we can actually use this type of framework to make learning like engaging and fun and like participatory and… But yeah, just like starting working at the museum and then like…like almost all museums in like…the Global North, there are a lot of colonial collections and things that they should not have [in their]…in that space. There was a working group that was working to kind of like address this and figure out how to move forward like with these collections, and I would like…I joined that and I had like a lot of brilliant ideas, and it was really like a lot of lobbying and I really spoke my mind [laughing], and I would say that was like the start of my…like a bit of activism like outside of uni. And at that time, like I was familiar with the concept of decolonisation but very much in the sense of like state independence, and then coming and learning about like decolonial work and theory in the context of museums, like I think…I have very different thoughts than I did way back then now about that. But then I was just like, no, like we have to do this, like we have to actually go to those communities. Like why are we people with like university-educated in the West sitting in a room and deciding what to do when we could just…do our best, especially if you have money and resources, like actually just go to the people and let them tell their own stories. So, it was a lot of lobbying. A lot of people didn't like the way I was speaking. One of my colleagues and I, we actually advocated for the gallery which is violent, which held most of these collections, to close down, and like, thankfully, it is closing down. But that took like a lot of work, a lot of repetition, I want to say like gaslighting because a lot of people would be like, "No, we didn't, we didn't know this" or "We didn't hear this" and it's like we literally said this in the last meeting, or, again, the way emotional labour disproportionately falls on people of certain identities [in/and] how there's such an extraction process of knowledge, where like these people would extract knowledge, manifest it in their own ways and get praise for it, do you know what I mean, which was really tough. But I think one thing that I'm happy about is just the fact that the gallery is closing. Because they also don't listen to us, they don't really have a plan about what's happening afterwards – like they're kind of working on something. But the powers that be…

And, again, I just want to talk about something that I found interesting like starting my activism outside of university, like there is…there's like…people love to think about issues [laughing] rather than systems. And I mean, we're all on like a learning journey here, but I think that's something I realised when I got to the museum, is that, no, like I'm fighting a system. Like you shutting down a gallery or like changing an exhibition isn't going to fix all the issues you have in your museum with transphobia, homophobia, anti-blackness, misogyny, Islamaphobia, do you know what I mean, because you're focused on an issue. It's like, oh, this…essentially, in this like 21st Century, this isn't right anymore, we'll fix this and then everything will be fine. But no, it's like systems. Like I think that everyone should be

part of a union, do you know what I mean, and it's like mobilising to get people to sign up to a union which will hopefully be recognised and change the organisation in a certain way. So, that opened my eyes to certain things.

And then, I also…started working with the NUS, like about a year later into my job, as a…a Decolonise Education Consultant, and that was like a really interesting [field/feat]. So I was really passionate – because, during my time in uni, I did a lot of student advocacy and community building, and I…that…like, to be blunt, that like saved my life, if that makes sense [laughing]. Like facing so much violence every day in an institution that actually despises you – that's the only way I know how to put it. You don't really have resources. You're begging for like resources, for recognition, for like all these things, and they're not listening to you. Like when I would go to like Soul Food Friday, that was something like a little…a little bandage on my heart, do you know what I mean, when you have a political discussion and you're actually seeing like the way you think being represented on a panel – that's like another bandage on my heart. When you just have a coffee hour and it's a space to like vent and just hold space for people to just be able to like let go, that's another bandage. So, when I saw the Decolonise Education Campaign, I was really excited because I was like, oh, like we could do this, em….and like nationwide level, like through NUS with the universities and things like that. So, I would say that's like my other…small part of activism outside of university.

Kyra: Thank you. And just going back to your point about people are so quick to focus on kind of issues rather than systems, and I think that really hits the nail on the head, like that's the difference between almost like reforming and transforming.

Drea: Yeah!

Kyra: And what we really want is the transformation but… We don't want something to just kind of like mend this here but then the system itself is still broken, and I think, yeah, that's just…I really wanted to highlight that point, thank you.

Drea: Thank you. There's a revolutionary called Kwame Ture, or some people know him as Stokely Carmichael, and he's interesting. Obviously, like as a man of the times [laughing], I don't agree with everything he thought about certain groups, but like he talks about the [?] of mobilisation and organisation and like, essentially, we want revolution, not reform. And I think that's the thing that has been a battle as well. And like I don't believe in [ED&I, DI], like all that stuff. As Angela Davis said, I believe that there's a white supremist tactic to make people of colour docile [laughing] – just to be blunt, just to be out there! Because, again, it's

focusing on issues and not systems – like, okay people, like go and get your money doing consulting and stuff, but don't pretend you're like changing lives. I'm so sorry, but that's just…that's just my thought because, again, change takes time, and every day is contributing to liberation – that's how I feel, like it's a progressive step and all that stuff. But sometimes, inadvertently, we are strengthening these institutions [laughing] with certain things we do for them because…it's hard because now…back in the day, you could be like, "Oh, you're racist" and they'd be like, "You know what, you're kind of right", but now they'd be like, "Wait, the director is Black – what do you mean? What do you mean?!" Do you know what I mean? "She's fine – what do you mean?" And like all these things… So, yeah, I want to… yeah, we're here for revolution, not reform. We're not trying to… Like, I'm so sorry, I don't believe institutions can be changed from the inside. I feel like people can make…like small reformations, to be honest. Like that's why there are a few more people of colour in positions of power, but, again, representation does not equal liberation. We need like a total uphauling of the system. We need to dismantle and rebuild. When you build a house and the foundations are shaky, if you build another house on top, you will have the same problems, like you literally need to uproot the foundations, maybe even go build in another place [laughing] and let the whole thing rot and just start from scratch. But we cannot be doing up the walls in this house because the rot is still coming through. I'm smelling it. Anytime I clean the damp, it comes back. So, we need to come up with like better solutions, and, yeah, that's why I really am interested in like…I guess it's like, now, looking beyond decolonisation because that word has been bastardised, it has been ruined, ruining it – look at my lips, ruining it, they have ruined it, they have ruined the word, especially working in like the museum sector, like people have loved to throw that word around and I'm like, "You don't understand what you're talking about." Decolonial theory is something that is very complex, and you can't just be applying it to things. And I think that the issue is that decolonisation has kind of become a synonym for like diversity or diversifying, which is so incorrect and it is so wrong. It is a complex process of a series of like actions, attitudes and behaviours, starting from within [laughing]. Like Ngugi wa Thiong'o talks about decolonising the mind and, for him, that's a series of certain things he wants like people of African descent to do, such as like rejecting like colonial languages, like going into your own languages, things like that. Frantz Fanon describes decolonisation as a violent process. And, here, people are talking about we're decolonised because we give a grant to a Black person… So disrespectful! So, yeah [laughing]…I just went off there on a bit of a rant, but essentially my activism started because I realised that there's so much work that we can do in our everyday lives to contribute to like overall liberation, and like I chose to work in the museum sector so that's going to be my primary focus. Meanwhile, some people are going to be working with like non-for-profits or like…even some people in finance, we don't know, maybe they'll do something, who knows? But I feel like everyone…I believe everyone has a duty, has like literally a duty. Like when you wake up – I always say this to people, and like obviously I'm a human being, I'm not perfect, I'm still learning, I'm still unlearning so much, but like when I wake up, I'm like how can I be the best that I can be today, do you know what I mean, and that looks like different things for different people.

Kyra: I just wanted to revisit your work on the Decolonise Education Campaign. Could you maybe talk us through some of the things that you were like responsible for, and I guess your role in particular on this campaign?

Drea: Yeah. So, in terms of my role, I was acting mainly like, in the beginning, it was like an engagement capacity, was like how can we get people to like engage with this campaign and understand what it's about and draw them in and kind of do some education, but by the end of the first year, I realised that like…the way decolonisation was being used was just not adequate. So, then, I feel like I switched into more of like an educational role, where like we had the Decolonisers Programme where we had like a set of booklets and we had student groups and SUs apply and like the whole process was to like kind of go through a bootcamp to learn about decolonisation and create their own mini-campaign at the end that would receive a bit of funding. And then…so we…like me and [Regnia], who was like my line manager, a very, very awesome person, like we worked on this like essentially programme and then people like went through it, and it was things like talking about like solidarity, like understanding like how to build a campaign, like what constitutes like a decolonial campaign, things like that. And then, at the end, when people were presenting their… campaigns, there was still like a large disconnect because people were presenting things like "I'm going to do like a Black History Month display", and I was like no [laughing], or like people would like, "I want to decolonise the curriculum" and then I'm like, "But what does that mean and what does that look like?" Like forcing a professor to add like…authors from marginalised voices of the Global South to a curriculum…like it doesn't actually change anything if they wouldn't know how to adequately talk about it, do you know what I mean, and things like that?

So, it was like really tough and quite disappointing at the end of it, realising that a lot of people hadn't adequately engaged with the material, and I think that was… And I think…like I still think about like why, if that make sense, and maybe it's like the way people wanted to engage with decolonial work was very much in like an EDI status, but then I realised it's the way people view the university and the institution and also the language they employ around these things. So, for the second year, I worked on [these decolonise the teachings] and we stripped it back and did a one-on-one. So, I gave like two-hour workshops in each nation of the United Kingdom, so like England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland. It was like online, invited people to come, and essentially we started from the beginning, like what is colonialism, right, how does that manifest, because I also think like, in British public memory, there's just [laughing] collective amnesia of like how this country is like…what it is, from the roads to the trains, to the hospitals, to a lot of the clothing stores we shop at, to grocery stores, like where did this money from? So, outlining colonialism and how that is embedded in our society, and then looking at certain scholars and defining what decolonisation is to them, and then thinking practically about steps on how to dismantle systems and not like strengthen them or like look at diversifying. So, had a few examples of

there have been some great organising efforts around like…like things like StopCambo in oil fields or the demilitarisation of universities, and I was like this is where your head should be at talking about decolonisation, rather than like, em, we're going to celebrate Black History Month. It's like [laughing]…okay, like it's fun, sometimes you get paid to do stuff, sometimes you get free food, but we…we're going that step further because we're fighting for liberation. I'm not fighting for assimilation. I'm not fighting for like basic stuff. I'm fighting for like a liberated world.

So, in terms of stuff I did, it was just like…I guess doing a lot of like research and creating workshops and like I guess coaching people about what decolonial work could look like in the universities. And, with hindsight, like I think that the campaign was very ambitious because like…I'm not…and I'm not a pessimist, like I don't think, but like…we're a long way off of like decolonising any institution in this country, and I think that it's very much like small steps.

First, we need to understand what does it mean to like organise as a community. How do we love and care for one another? And I think these are narratives that are very much absent from like activists and organising and communities right now, like love is language that is so like absent, and like, a couple of weeks ago, I went to this Black ecofeminist summit, and it was like hosted by people like Mikaela Loach, Daze Aghaji, Leah Thomas, who's from the States, and they… It was like so inspiring because one of the questions they asked us was like "What is your dream for love?" do you know what I mean, and I thought that was so powerful, like in a space like that, to think about love in our fight for liberation and like what does that mean. And it's also very much like stripping it back to like basics because I think that education is so important, and I think that forming relationships and bonds with people is so important, and that also takes time before we… And, again, it's like unity [laughing]! There's a reason why like a lot of campaigns were success: it's because people were like we are against this, and we know what we're against, and we know what we want, and we're going to achieve it. Now, there's just a lot happening, and like capitalism doesn't help because, again, it's a distraction, racism is a distraction, as Tony Morrison said, like we have to eat, we're dealing with so many different things, and like this very like neoliberal individualistic narrative that is being so pervasive in our society just isn't helping. So, yeah… Sorry, I tend to like veer off a bit!

But essentially, I think that like, with the campaign, I think - I would say like at least two people were able to like learn from it, but, again, because it's like individuals from universities, you can't conduct decolonial work by yourself [laughing], so then it's just like really interesting. So, I feel like, for me, it's like what… And, again, as I mentioned, it's like… like I have my community, my community is quite global and I'm really grateful for it, but, again, it's like, in my job, I have, em, comrades who I work with, who I support and we

brainstorm ideas, like how can we try and do things in my capacity, and we help and support each other to do that, and I feel like that's something that I'd like to see happen more in certain spaces because, again, like activism now is kind of like [influism/influencerism]. So, if you have a certain follow account, like all the stuff, people tend to be very segregated and don't make friends like easily, and, again, everyone…everyone is going through their own stuff. But I also feel like healing is also a part of liberation, like putting aside our egos, coming together, working through things. We may not always agree on the tiniest minute thing, but we know that we want freedom. We want a world free from white supremacy, transphobia, homophobia. We want to dismantle the colonial matrices that like have been in power for a couple of hundred years. And it will take time, but at least we know that this is what we're fighting for, and that's something that I really wanted to try and embed in…[as I was doing] the campaign and talking and giving workshops to people.

But another thing that I realised as well is that people aren't honest with themselves [laughing], and this is going back to like…like you can be nice but you can still be racist [laughing] because of the way you view certain things, and if you're not willing to like admit where you need to change, you will not change. And I always talk about my journey. Like I grew in a very like fundamentalist Christian culture, if that makes sense, and there's so much I've had to unlearn, do you know what I mean, but I'm willing to embrace that. And, again, when we talk about discomfort, it's not someone says "racism" and you're shivering in your boots. I always say this: if you're not crying and throwing up, you're not…you're not being uncomfortable properly because to be self-reflective and be like, wow, like I really was upholding these structures and contributing to this, that doesn't feel good, and you have to unlearn that. You forgive yourself, and then you learn, and then you continue to relearn. There's, at [our] university, there's a beautiful Black feminist called [Shanese Yard] and she always used to say, she was like, "You unlearn, learn, and you relearn, and you keep learning" and that's the whole process, and it's never-ending, because we're human beings, we're not perfect.

And I think, for me, doing all that work, that's one thing I've realised, that it is a process [laughing], like a two-year campaign isn't necessarily going to change much, and, again, it's like we need to build solidarity and form community. I think that's the basis of how anything is going to be successful. And I feel like that's a struggle nowadays. Like everyone's lonely, everyone's like online, like people have friends but they can't talk to them about certain things, do you know what I mean, and that's like really sad, and I think that like activism is just as much the political as it is the personal, and, as individuals, like how are we…like how are we working on ourselves, rooted in community, to actually be able to contribute and have…I guess like a grounding, do you know what I mean, that is like rooted in something more than like mobilising, like, okay, this is trendy, this is popular, Black Lives Matter, I'm going to [post some black square] but I'm also going to touch my Black friend's hair when I – you know what I mean? Like let's…let's be honest with ourselves. And like, again, it's like…

step aside [laughing], don't…don't hinder the movement. If this is not for you, just step aside, do you know what I mean? So like, we can work together and come together. I don't believe that we have to agree on everything to work together. It's just like… There's a quote actually by Audre Lorde that I really like and she goes: "Without community, there's no liberation, but community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretence that these differences do not exist." And that's how we need to carry and move forward because these…tensions… I don't know, like sometimes labels can be useful, but also, sometimes, the way we have transformed them into these like defining categories, a bit like race, it can also hinder a lot of progress because…yeah [laughing]…it can be a lot. But yeah, I… Again, I tend to ramble a bit [laughing] so…

Kyra: No, not at all! No, but I completely agree with you, like, as much as it is good to kind of be able to have like that presence on social media and online and things like that, at the end of the day, like the movement has to be rooted in community, in being with people and in being present with each other. I mean, I think, you know, like you said, you touched upon so many things, but coming back to me is like…we need to be willing to kind of…own up to when we are complicit to these systems. Yes, there are people out there who might not necessarily be racist but you are complicit in racist systems in this colonial system. And I think, as soon as people kind of…are able to kind of…differentiate themselves in that, like we're not going to be able to go anywhere because I think a lot of people see it as a personal attack when it's… We're fighting a system. I'm not fighting you, like…you know?

Drea: 100%. No, I agree because I…like I always say like, oh, I hate whiteness, and then people are like…and I'm like no, like…like whiteness, like whiteness is…whiteness is the bane of my existence. That's my nemesis. That's my nemesis, and I will name it and shame it, and I think that's also a problem is that, especially if one is working within an institution, they don't name and shame, so that's how work just ends up being like a whole muddle because it's like…we're doing DI, we're doing all these things, but if you cannot name what you're trying to change or fight against, then what are you doing? And I find that can be like the same thing…within like especially Britain because racism doesn't exist here, if that makes sense. It's just like, no, like name it, like these are problems, like there is a reason why, you know, like Black and Asian young men and boys are disproportionately, you know, like attacked, like harassed, searched by the police, do you know what I mean, like there's a reason why like knife crime is prevalent within certain communities, do you know what I mean, and that is white supremacy. People need to leave this weird like blaming things on other things. It's like, no, if you impoverish an area, if you apply austerity measures to an area, you close down youth centres, people can't eat, people can't do leisurely things, they're going to be angry, do you know what I mean? And, yeah, I just…I really think that we need to really like name and shame, and I think that's the thing that… I don't know, like I don't want to be that person who's like, "Oh, like British people are like really complicit and they don't care." I see a lot of those talks over Twitter, and people compare us to France

because there are a lot of people doing like great work and like mobilising against stuff. I see a lot of organisations like, you know, Sister Space, who are like doing great work and they're battling Hackney Council all the time, but, you know, [they're] still here and things like that. There's like new [beacon books]. They're like little hubs. And I feel like – Mikaela Loach says this, she's always just like, "Join a group, join an organisation!" and as…like everyone can do like their little thing, but, again, we have to name what we're fighting against. And I think Britain isn't very good at that because – now, I always get into arguments at a party because I'm like, "The tea you drink, the sugar, the chocolate bars that have been created, all of that exists because of the Transatlantic slave-trade and colonialism and extraction of resources from the African continent, Latin America, and Asia," do you know what I mean, and then people get uncomfortable and they're like, "No, tea's British!" and I'm like, no, it's not [laughing], like, no, it's not at all. And I guess it's like this – that's why I think education is so important.

Kyra: Absolutely.

Drea: And…but at the same time, people have to be willing to want to learn, and, again, that's why we go back to the personal thing, is that like, with the discomfort thing, like discomfort doesn't feel nice but undergoing the process…it's like healing from trauma. You just…you kind of have to…you kind of have to do it if you're going to come out the other side as a better person. If you're not going to, you know, project and like do all these things that trauma…like trauma-informed behaviours, essentially, like you can like work through that and just try, and I think that's the thing that also people are lacking. Because you mentioned like some people say it's a personal attack and it's like, no, like we all benefit from a certain system. Like, again, I remember someone saying that like, if you are a cisgender person, like inherently assume you are transphobic, and do everything you can every day to just fight that system because you are cisgendered, you're not thinking about other things, do you know what I mean? Like if you are a straight person, if you are a man, if you are a white person, like the system already benefits you, so just assume [laughing], inadvertently, you are harming someone else because the system benefits you, and what are you doing to try and change that? And I think that's something that I think is important and I'm trying to embed, and, again, it's like a process, like how do I actually embed this into my everyday actions, rather than something happens [clicks fingers] and then I'm on the streets and then I'm back in my house, […], and then something happens and I'm on the streets… And, again, it takes community [support with that] because we…we're not…we're not destined to do this alone.

If I have time, I just want to read out one last quote that my friend sent me… So, I have a beautiful friend called Gabrielle and we have the best discussions about what liberation means, and I believe she was reading 'Communion' by Bell Hooks, and I really love this

passage, and it goes: "The wish for commune exists in the body. It is not for strategic reasons alone that gathering together has been at the heart of every movement for social change. These meetings were, in themselves, the realisations of a desire that is at the core of human imaginings, the desire to locate ourselves in community, to make our survival a shared effort, to experience a palpable reverence in our connections with each other, in the earth that sustains us." And I just thought that…is just like…so, so, so beautiful…and yeah…

Kyra: Thank you so much. For this last segment, I just wanted to kind of talk about the topic of youth activism more broadly and thinking about the role of students and young people in this kind of work. What do you think young people need to feel more empowered to participate in political activism?

Drea: That's a really good question. I think that they need to be seen, and that's very hard in our society where like, em, you look at the people making decisions around us and they're all like old people [laughing], looking at who runs the countries and things like that. I mean, there's like Youth Parliament and there are people doing great things, but then I think it's actually… I think it's really tough because, again, I'm not someone who would necessarily want to like feed into and bolster up the system, but I think that, em, as communities, when we show that when young people tell us, we listen, they're more inclined to keep speaking. But then again, it can be a cultural thing, like I come from a West African culture where like when you're of a certain age, you say something and they're like, "Why are you talking?" do you know what I mean, so that discourages you from speaking. I think this can start like from…like the home and community, where like…when people – and, again, it's like active listening. When we make people feel seen and heard, they're more inclined to share more and like talk more, and I think that's something that's like really important. I think that – and, again, we can do that in like activist communities, like when…young people should be able to speak at rallies. I think it's beautiful when I see people taking their children out to protests and they're holding up signs, and you can tell that they're very aware of like what's going on. Maybe they don't have the exact language to…talk about it, but I think that's something…

I think that, also, like social media can be mobilised in a great way, but the unfortunate thing is that misinformation spreads too fast [laughing] on those platforms, so I don't want to rely solely on social media. But I also think it's just…like we are the future. Like Whitney Houston said, "I believe that children are the future, treat them well and let them lead the way…" do you know what I mean?! Like I think…I don't know, it's really hard because I always say a lot of things start from home, but home means different things to different people. But I really think that, if we have young people in our lives, we really should be having conversations with them and chatting to them and just letting them know that they're seen and heard because a lot of them have better ideas than us [laughing] and they're younger than us and

it's just bolstering that up, because, again, I don't want to be like.. [You always see] a lot of politicians all doing stuff in this Youth Parliament, but then I realise that I don't want young people to put a lot of energy in like trying to infiltrate a system that really [laughing]…it's stuck in its ways, it's not going to shift. But I think it starts with community. How do we celebrate, venerate and lift up our young people? How do we support them in achieving their goals? How do we help them on their learning journeys and things like that? So, yeah…

Kyra: And I guess, from your experience, like what are some universal principles that you feel like social justice groups and movements should follow if they want to really like progress and move in the right direction towards their aims?

Drea: That's a great question. I think that solidarity is one of the biggest ones. I know I've been like saying a lot of quotes but I really…like a lot of my knowledge comes from a lot of academics and people who came before me. So, there's professor called Robin D. G. Kelley and I love him because he writes so brilliantly. I recently just got a book called 'Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination' and I'm going to read this. But one thing I also love about him is like he's also like a jazz historian [laughing], which is really cool!

Kyra: I didn't know that about him.

Drea: Yeah. He's written like…I don't remember who the musicians are but like he's written like biographies of like jazz musicians, which is like really, really cool.

Kyra: Oh wow!

Drea: But he has this quote which I love so much, and he says: "Our support and solidarity with people who are struggling for human dignity and justice should not depend on their knowing anything about us. Solidarity is not a market exchange. It's not "You need to give us your love and we'll give you ours". Whether it's the Rohingya, whether it's the Roma, whether it's the Palestinians, we've got to be able to say this is not acceptable." And I think that's one of the bases that I think we need in social justice organisations, like let us… And, again, I'm not really a label person, and sometimes I get in trouble for this, but let's move away from "Because I'm this, I am therefore this…" because you white leftist people are still racist AF, like sorry to say. Just because you define…just because you identify as someone who's a socialist doesn't mean you don't have capitalist tendencies and wouldn't like walk over someone in the first [tribe/try]. But what does it actually mean? And it goes back to like love, do you know what I mean? Like what does it mean to actually take care of one

another? What does it mean to build community? What does solidarity mean? And, obviously, it's hard, you know what I mean? There's misogyny. There's anti-blackness. Anti-blackness is a pet-peeve of mine because I also want you to be liberated but [laughing] let's work together, you know what I mean, to dismantle the system. But then again, I am not going to then turn around and start…you know, being discriminatory to another group just because they've been anti-black to me. I'm here for solidarity. My liberation is tied up in the liberation with other people, and I really want people to recognise that.

Kyra: And, lastly, just for this segment, what advice would you give to students who are entering university, or who are already in university, and also want to demand social justice within that space?

Drea: That's a really good question. I think the main thing, which, as I said earlier, it saved my life, is insert yourself in community. Insert yourself in community because maybe you'll be able to achieve something, which like, visibly, it's like getting a professor of colour to teach in the thing or like, em, maybe your school might start, you know, procuring stuff from a Black-owned business, but, at the same time, those violent structures are still in place and they do these things to appease you. But when you have community… Like one thing I've been thinking about, and I haven't written on it enough, is like the concept of…like the politics of refusal and what does it mean to create space outside, do you know what I mean [laughing]? Like I reject the system. I will create space outside. And I think that's something that I think like, inadvertently, like unconsciously, like I explored whilst an undergrad because, as like Black students, we just created our own space – like we had our own budget, we would have Soul Food Fridays, we would do our own thing, we didn't care about timing, you know what I mean? We brought food into spaces, we did what we had to do, like it was just this concept of like joy and freedom. And I want to say that I really would love more people, especially in these big institutions, to focus on like nurturing and taking care of yourself than like trying to fight the institution. Like maybe some people may not like that, I mean, it may sound counterproductive, but like…self-preservation is really important and like a lot of us… Like I spent a lot of my university like battling like a lot of…like mental illness, you know, seriously, I burnt out three times in four years, and that's not fun. And now, like I see the people who've come after me, and I'm not saying they're not facing issues, but they're doing a lot more, like the Black Student Network is having like afro dance classes and things like that, which will create community in a different way – rather than like creating a strategy to like fight your professor, go have some fun, do you know what I mean?! I would say that's my advice.

Like, also, if you are wanting to challenge the institution, like have a plan. They love business cases and all that nonsense and how this will do that and this and that, but like come together as a group of people, identify a problem, and try to create a solution and like

organise together, do you know what I mean, be strategic. If someone wants to run for like student president or something, someone else is going to get the part-time job in this office and all that stuff. Be strategic with how you enter the space but then also know that this is not your be-all and end-all. Your life is just beginning. Like I entered the working world [and always felt] really tired, do you know what I mean? So, like I guess my main advice is be rooted in community, preserve yourself, focus on experiencing joy and like freedom and liberation and like laughter, and if you're willing…like if you want to fight the institution, definitely like go for it, but don't do it alone. Be rooted and strategic in the way you do it. And, sometimes, you just have to give up and provide resources in your own way, if that makes sense, and that's why community is important, because you can come together – you can do your study groups, you can do what you need to do, do you know what I mean? But… I'm not going to lie, I honestly don't think fighting an institution is always worth it, yeah.

Kyra: Oh, Drea, I felt that! Thank you.

Drea: No worries [laughing]! No worries!

Kyra: So, unfortunately, you know, this interview is coming to an end, but as a question I like to end on, what would you like to see happen or see develop within higher education in the next 10 years?

Drea: That's a beautiful question. I would like non-traditional forms of learning. I really would love people to be able to submit dissertations. And I know this is happening in some places, but I really want academia to just stop – like take the stick out of your bum, you know what I mean? Like I want people to be able to submit dissertations that are comic-books, that are films. I want indigenous forms of knowledges to be appreciated and centred in certain disciplines. Like I really…and, again, I was talking to my friend Gabrielle about this, I really [don't want] certain identities being forced to explain themselves when they are talking about something when white people don't have to do that. My reference [….]. I'm sorry. I'm not going to…and when I come to my conclusion, I'm not going to explain how I came to that conclusion because [F?] just came to that conclusion. He did not explain how he came to that conclusion, do you know what I mean? So, my prayer for higher education is for them to be like a lot more creative in the way that knowledge is disseminated, the way that people are like [?] their work, because grades don't matter at the end of the day. It's just you learn how to finesse a system. And I really want like…like learning and education to actually be at the heart of higher education, rather than like profits and prestige and like all that stuff that doesn't mean anything. And I really also want funds to be redistributed fairly. I think we need to really change the whole structure of how we view higher education and these rankings and like all that stuff, and like there are a lot of researchers and professors

who need adequate funding who can contribute to transforming our world but they're not being given those resources. So, that's what I want.

And, yeah, just to kind of tie in – I always love this… So, there's an activist called Mariame Kaba – she's really, really awesome. She's based in…I think she's based in Chicago. She does a lot of work around prison abolition and she's worked with like women who…like sexual violence and things like that, and she always says this – like not always, she used to tweet this, she'd always tweet at the end of the day, she'd be like "May tomorrow bring you some more justice and more peace" and I think that's such a beautiful way to end this because tomorrow is another day. We are all working towards a common, shared goal, hopefully, and it's just working bit by bit together – that's, the main thing, together – in each of our capacities, which looks different for everyone, to dismantle…dismantle all these repressive systems that have created the world that we live in today.

Kyra: Perfect answer!

Drea: Thank you so much.

Kyra: Honestly, I cannot thank you enough for joining me, like I just feel really like touched by just this conversation with you and I just…I can't thank you enough for just holding this space with me.

Drea: Thank you so much for having me on this podcast, like it's honestly been like really amazing to chat to you as well. I hope I did the questions some justice!

Kyra: You absolutely, honestly, I'm even thinking maybe you need to take my job!

Drea: No, no, no [laughing]! No, honestly, the work you do is incredible, and I'm just really appreciative of you like starting these conversations and having these conversations, and, again, like it's really inspiring because, on every single episode, someone will hear one thing and they'll be like whoa…like I need to like research more into this or maybe I need to look into this and all that stuff, and it's all a process, like no one is perfect and like it's just…step by step, and step by step. So, I appreciate you so much – thank you.

Kyra: If you enjoyed listening to this episode, let us know on Twitter @psjprojects. To find out more information or access our tools, visit our website at blog.westminster.ac.uk/psj