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Podcast transcript:

Kyra: Thank you for tuning in to the Pedagogies for Social Justice podcast, brought to you by a student-staff partnership at the University of Westminster. This is a platform for students and educators to exchange knowledge and encourage discussion about the current challenges facing higher education. I'm your host, Kyra, and, for this episode, I'll be in conversation with Dr Eddie Bruce Jones, a legal academic and the Head of the Department of Law at Birkbeck College London. Eddie's research and writing largely focuses on topics such as racism, colonialism, state violence and citizenship, though he also plays directorial roles in organisations such as the Institute of Race Relations, Rainbow Migration, the Journal of Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Law and more. In this interview, we delve into Eddie's upbringing and academic journey, his role in the Institute of Race Relations, educational research, and how we might begin to decolonise Law curricula. Towards the end, Eddie shares some insight into the postgraduate course he designed and currently teaches at Birkbeck called Race, Law & Literature.

Kyra: Hi Eddie, thank you so much for joining me on this episode of the podcast. It's so nice to finally meet you.

Eddie: Hey, it's nice to meet you too. Thank you so much for having me on the podcast. It's really, really nice to be a part of this. I've listened to some of the other episodes, and I'm honoured, thanks.

Kyra: Oh, amazing! So, I thought we could begin with talking just a little bit more about yourself. So, first things first, where are you from?

Eddie: So, I'm from the US. I was born in Englewood, New Jersey, which is a small town in New Jersey, not far from Manhattan, but as far as kind of suburban towns go in New Jersey, Englewood is...kind of urban. It was mostly Black and Latino when I was growing up, but it's very mixed, and now it's becoming very gentrified, so actually I go back and I don't recognise it in some ways when I go back. But that's where I was born and brought up.

My family, so my Dad's side of the family, a lot of them are originally from the Southern States, from South Carolina and from Virginia, but we've been in New Jersey, on that side, for a few generations; and then my Mom's side of the family is Jamaican. So, yeah, that's where I'm from...

Kyra: Nice! And how would you describe your upbringing in terms of how race was kind of



seen and felt in your household?

Eddie: It's interesting because, when I think about it now, I probably see things with my own sensibilities, but when I was growing up, I felt like race was ever-present, but it was also not something that was always verbalised, or it was coded. You know, growing up in a Black household, no one ever needed to somehow clarify where we were and what challenges we were faced with. So, sometimes it came up in terms of how different members of the family looked different or had certain ideas about what, you know, what it meant to be Jamaican for example, but nothing that was, you know, a constant kind of...thing that we needed to explore explicitly – it was just always implicit and always there. But I remember distinctly as a kid being told, all the time, you know, “You have to work twice as hard as your white classmates” and all that sort of stuff, or being made to feel like there are always going to be challenges, but I have to say, within the household, it sort of didn't necessarily register to me, as a little kid, that race was playing a role in a family within the house. I think, later, I think I view that with a bit more nuance to hear how people talked about certain things – you know, colourism is real, and that happens within families as well. So, yeah...but that didn't really characterise I think my upbringing necessarily.

Kyra: My next question is: did this change for you entering adulthood, but, more specifically, did you feel like your racial identity was something you had to like kind of re-navigate or negotiate?

Eddie: Mm...it kind of...I mean, it was interesting because...moving from being kind of a young child to pre- teenager years, I didn't see racial identity as being something...heterogeneous somehow in my family. I knew we were Black. I knew we looked different - you know, there was a range of different ways that people looked. I knew some of my family was Jamaican and some wasn't, but, as like a 10- year-old or 12-year-old, none of that really processed down into thinking about how that would require navigation.

But, later, as a teenager and a young adult, I became much more interested in the particular family stories that members of the family might have to tell, their different experiences...of course how those experiences were similar, but the difference of, you know, my grandparents who migrated to the US from Jamaica and their experiences, versus my grandparents who were born in the North, but their parents had migrated from the South to escape, you know, lynching and whatever else during the great migration in the US, and I just wanted to know all about my ancestors and my family, you know, living and dead, so I just got much more interested, but that made it...more apparent that identity was a lot more complex. So, while, as an adult, I still identify as Black in pretty much every circumstance, the actual discussion around identity and origins and culture became much more nuanced and much more specific around different members of my family and different stories that they had to tell.

And I also began to see how race played a role in my childhood educationally, so being tracked in schools and seeing how that works, and, you know, I was in an all-Black school



district, Black and Latino, more or less, or at least a preponderance of the students were students of colour, in Englewood where I grew up; and then I moved to an all-white school system, and I was one of literally two or three Black students in the whole school, from 4th grade through 6th grade, and there, I was... you know, I got good grades, I was very nerdy all the time, and, you know, in both the predominantly students of colour school district and the all-white school district, I was kind of put into these advanced classes and...my educational achievements were...validated. But then when I moved to a school district that was really quite mixed, when I was I think in 8th grade – so I was a teenager and I was coming into a different set of understandings about how the world worked – I noticed that there was more doubt that was cast upon my educational achievements, and I think, now, and even then, I was realising that that was partly because there were then these groups of students that the...you know, the teachers and the administrators were basically...stereotyping. So, because I fitted into a stereotypable group in the mixed school, in a way that I didn't necessarily in the all-Black or all-white schools, it was clear that they could just track me into whatever classes they wanted to - so regardless of what I achieved prior, they were tracking me into more limited courses, and that was an interesting lesson to learn as, you know, a 13-year-old, but it prepared me really well for knowing the hurdles and obstacles. And my family had told me all along, "You have to work twice as hard to prove yourself", so I think I had a chip on my shoulder as a 13-year-old, but that went away because I was just a lot more focused after that, and I knew the structural kind of position I was in as a young adult or a teenager, a Black teenager, in an education system that was, you know, very prone to stereotyping young Black kids.

So, yeah, that's how I was reflecting on race growing up, and I think, both in terms of thinking about my own family and my experiences as a learner, I was...I became much more prominent and explicit in my thinking.

Kyra: Thank you. So, when was it that you started to develop an interest in studying the law – like was that always a career you wanted to pursue?

Eddie: I knew I wanted to do something related to social justice...because, in the US, where I did my undergraduate, Law is...it's a graduate programme, so you first have to do a whole four-year degree in Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, or whatever you choose, but you can't do Law as a first degree, so by the time I finished my studies, my undergraduate studies, I knew I wanted to have a career where I would have an impact on people's lives and, you know, do something related to social change, social justice. And Law was one of the things I had been thinking about but it wasn't the only thing. You know, I was considering doing anthropological research because that was what I was interested in. I was interested in trying to understand how human societies are...you know, how they're structured, the systems of meanings people create for themselves, but I didn't know what the career would look like. So, I didn't think that Law was the only way to do it, but I applied to Law School, and I deferred multiple times to be sure because it was a big investment, and then, ultimately, I thought that learning the law would help me to be a better...kind of social citizen, to be able to leverage whatever change I wanted to see in a different way, so I decided to invest in it kind of as a skill-set, not knowing if I was going to



practise law or not.

Kyra: Would you mind just giving us like a bit of a breakdown of your academic background, so from your undergrad to now, because I find it really interesting, just like your journey...?

Eddie: Yeah, oh thanks! I usually refer to it as a journey of debt to friends, which I've only recently literally paid off the debts from my education. So, I did my undergraduate at Harvard in the US from '98 to 2002, where my major was African-American Studies and my minor was Anthropology, and then I had language focuses in Spanish and German because, for Anthropology, you needed to have kind of some areas of the world where you were kind of looking to do your research, but also I just thought languages were really important. So, African-American Studies became...kind of a lens for me to...to see the world differently, and it really politicised me. In a way, it kind of showed me what education could look like – not the education I'd had in schools. So, that was a game-changer for me, thinking about what knowledge really means, by doing a degree in African-American studies.

And then, Anthropology was important for the methodological reasons of knowing how to do research, how to talk to people, and to consider the ethics of interviewing, and ask questions that open up more questions rather than try to give definite answers. So, I did Anthropology as undergraduate and then I did Anthropology in graduate school because I moved to Germany right after I graduated from college, and I studied Anthropology as a major in my Master's, and the minor was Literature & Culture, focusing on North America – so it was very convoluted. But my Anthropology Master's degree, I studied...I basically looked at prisons and how HIV and hepatitis prevention programmes in prisons were debated in politics, and how activists tried to push for harm-reduction programmes in prisons. So, I did lots of interviews with activists and I really loved that degree – it took me three years to do, a very long kind of process.

Then, that's when I finished...I stopped deferring law school and I said, "Okay, I'm going to go to law school now," and I ended up doing a joint JD-LLM programme with Columbia University in New York and King's College London, and that was great. The Columbia part was very rigorous. American law schools are a very specific type of learning – so, you know, the Socratic method, you sit in class in a huge lecture hall, and I remember, at Columbia, when you were on call to answer a question, you knew that the lecturer or professor was going to call on you that day, so you had to prepare, you know, for your life because then, when you're called on, you'd turn on your microphone, because you had a microphone in the lecture hall, and then your microphone, the light would go on, so everyone knows who it is that's responding, and you'd respond and you'd be assessed on it, basically - I mean, it would feature in the way that you were marked. So, anyway, that was...it was trial by fire, and I liked law school in the US, but not everyone does! And then my LLM at King's was in Public International Law, which I really, really enjoyed.

And then, after that, I joined a law firm, but, at the same time, I did enrol in a PhD programme back at Humboldt University in Berlin in the Anthropology Department where I'd done my Master's before, and I did the PhD living in London but travelling to Berlin, and



I didn't want to tell people about it because I knew that working at a law firm and then doing a degree on the side might raise questions about my commitment to being at the law firm, which ultimately panned out to be true – I mean, I left the law firm to be an academic. So, I started that in 2008 and, you know, I didn't finish my PhD until 2012, and I defended it in 2013.

Kyra: Wow, that's amazing! Intense, but, I mean, you made it!

Eddie: Yeah, made it out the other side! And I don't regret it. The debt was rough, but I really don't regret it. All those decisions were useful for me in some way.

Kyra: Amazing. And just considering like your history of attending some like really prestigious and renowned universities in both the States and Europe, looking back, do you feel like you had access to good representations or people you could racially identify with, like that could have been in your lecturers, your course content, or like the student body...? I'm just trying to get an idea of your experience of being a young person of colour in these historically kind of white spaces for practically like your entire higher education student life...

Eddie: Mm, yeah, that's a really good question, and I...I'm pretty greedy when it comes to selecting courses and wanting to do the...you know, learn what I want. I was very selfish and I think that paid off because I followed my interests, I learned from the academics I wanted to learn from, for the most part, when it was possible. So, for example, when I started my undergraduate, I started off as a Chemistry major, but then I kind of looked around and I was like, "Oh, Cornel West is teaching [?] African-American Studies – that looks really interesting. Regardless of my major, I want to do that to see..." you know. And then I realised that I was hearing things that I should have heard as a little kid, you know, narratives about the country I lived in that were completely different to the ones that I'd grown up with, and it was so important that I said, "Okay, this is what I need to dedicate myself to learning about while I'm here," and that stuck with me because, then, when I moved to Germany, which is a very, very white space academically, it was important for me to seek out those voices, those scholars who were doing work that was going to be able to speak to racism, colonialism, sexism, heterosexism, that I wouldn't necessarily find unless I looked for it.

So, you know, I found a scholar named [Greta Columba], who was teaching a recurring course at Humboldt at that time and she taught a class called Race, Sex & Racism from a Black Perspective – I think that's what the course was called the first year out – and it was so good I took it three times. I took the same course over and over again because it was never exactly the same but it was also more than just going through a syllabus – it was teaching tips for survival and teaching tips for understanding the racism that you'd experience every day in academia or on the street or whatever. That was really important for me. So, I mean, I've done that everywhere. At law school, you know, I took courses with Patricia – well, I wanted to take courses with Patricia Williams but she was away, but I went to talks that she gave, and with [Kimberley Grinshaw], and just sought out the people



that I really wanted to learn from, and I was just fortunate enough to be able to get spots in classes that they were teaching.

Eddie: But I think that's so important because, even if I don't feel that vulnerable to – maybe you'd say it a different way: even if I feel like I don't always need to see and hear from people who are like me, you know, or who have experience of...experience of having endured racism or...or bring experiential knowledge to the table – I think I do need that, and I think we all do, I think it's just a matter of being able to recognise the importance of that dynamic in your education. I mean, I think it's central to education generally, but...but I've been really lucky to be able to...to make that decision to seek out the scholars that I want to learn from.

Kyra: Yeah. No, absolutely – and thank you. So, follow your interests and the people that you want to learn from...

Eddie: Yeah.

Kyra: So, what inspired you to get into teaching in higher education, like what made you want to go back to teaching instead of going to...back to the law firms?

Eddie: Well, for me, I knew teaching also involved doing research and being...always engaged with, you know, further education and digging deeper into questions of, you know, the role of Law, critical thinking, along with the teaching, which I love, which is about exchanging with learners, being a learner myself in an environment where we're all teaching one another in some way - even though I'm the lecturer in a lot of these cases, I'm learning a lot from the perspectives of the students in the class. And I just knew that that was how I wanted to spend my time, like I said, being selfish and thinking about what I want from my own career. That was also where I felt the most fulfilment and I felt like I was getting...what I want out of the career. And it just, after being in practice – I was only at the law firm for about a year and a half, and I felt like I could do it, you know, if I'd stayed, I don't think I would be the most miserable person on earth, although I think the practice area that I was in, I wasn't interested in, and also, kind of thinking about corporate law and the ethics of the institutional arrangements of corporate law firms, I don't think that was something that I could really dedicate myself to doing. But...you know, there are certain aspects of working for a big organisation doing legal practice that I didn't hate, but it's just that I thought that academia would be a way for me to do what I love doing and to do what I'm good at doing, and to still feel like I'm making a difference in the lives of...of people, whether it's the students or colleagues or whether it's doing writing or some pro-bono that is going to actually have an effect on law or policy that's, you know, productive, so...yeah...

Kyra: So, I wanted to dedicate some time to talking about your role on the Board of Directors at the Institute for Race Relations, which is an anti-racist thinktank here in the UK, and it concentrates on researching, investigating and analysing pressing issues of contemporary British racism, amongst many other things as well. What does your specific role in the IRR entail?



Eddie: So, I am a council member of the Institute of Race Relations, and we are basically trustees, so we have collective oversight as to the workings of the organisation in general. We contribute to drafting and overseeing policies and other operational aspects of the organisation, but, really, what we do as trustees besides is have formal liability for the organisation as a registered organisation. We work with highly autonomous staff members, who are experts in their fields, to support their research initiatives and to guide, you know, to guide the staff where they need and want guidance. And we occasionally do substantive work as well, you know, write articles or contribute some...you know, an article or a talk, but usually that's because we're also committed to these issues and have connections throughout the UK and Europe, not necessarily only because we're on the council of the organisation.

Kyra: And what has been your most memorable moment in this position?

Eddie: Just the people that you meet, either in the organisation itself or, you know, people who come for talks, or you meet in the context of doing work on behalf of the organisation – it's just really nice to meet networks of people who are dedicated to examining race and racial justice. But I think one memorable moment, or memorable day, was at the memorial event for [Ace Sivanandan], who was a founder and pioneer of the Institute, and to hear figures like Gary Young and Colin Prescott, who's the chair of the council of the Institute, talk about Sivanandan's influence and work over the decades in the UK was really inspirational, so that was...that was a memorable highlight.

Kyra: And what do you think are some of the major challenges that race-related educational research faces today?

Eddie: One challenge is...the obvious one, which is critical race theory has been...demonised and cast as this...this brainwashing attempt of the liberal left to convince everyone that they're, you know, racists and accountable for racism. I think, in some ways, it is meant to tune us all into the fact that we're all complicit in some form of power and privilege, and that we need to be cognisant of that, whether it's about race or it's about gender or, you know, intersectional forms of oppression. It's not a bad thing to understand how we're all part of these systems of institutional and structural racism. I think the problem is that education is sometimes understood in a way that's very un-nuanced, and these depictions, especially when they come from a position of not having read any of the material that's classed as critical race theory, to just understand it as raising the issue of race being a problem in itself, I think the critical race theory issue right now in the media and the way it's being portrayed is a symptom of this larger issue of seeing race as an issue as a problem in education. I think it's really dangerous to imagine people feeling good about themselves or feeling safe or somehow protected from the issue of race. I think that's the opposite of education. It's basically...preventing people from understanding or from gaining a nuanced perspective on power. So, I think that is a challenge. You know, we see it, even in the UK, with questions around whether race should be taught about in schools. There was even something I think from...I think it was from the Office of Students,



I'll have to check, about whether we should be teaching anti-capitalist ideas. Those types of... I mean, the idea that we should kind of...prevent having discussions about very central concepts within our everyday lives, but also within scholarly literature, just doesn't really make too much sense to me.

So, I think that kind of impulse is difficult to square with what I think education is for, but also with this academic freedom debate, and I think academic freedom is also sometimes used as a weapon as well because I think, in general, most...I think most academics would probably agree that there's a usefulness to having scholarship be very open to discussing, you know, a whole wide range of [different/difficult] issues, but then there's some tension around whether certain types of debate, particularly debate that re-instantiates forms of racism or bigotry, should be allowed. That's kind of one part of it, and, you know, a quick example of that is, you know: do we give a carte-blanche to academics to say anything they want in the classroom, including using offensive language? So, that's one end of the debate, and I think that's...that should be taken really seriously.

The other end of the debate is where you have people, who...who want to use whatever language they choose, feel like that should be, you know, highly respected, under the academic freedom, and that failure to provide a space to say offensive things is actually the big problem. And I think we need to be really careful with how we balance this because I do think that...we do risk re-constituting the same types of exclusion, exclusionary practices, and, frankly, racist and colonial logics, if we...if we take a view on academic freedom that anything and everything is allowed, or that all views are of equivalent importance and therefore all views need to be ensured a space, because that could also lead to, I think, a re-constitution of these exclusions.

Yeah. I guess the only other thing that comes to mind about some of the major challenges that race-related educational research faces in more general terms is perhaps the type of funding that's available for certain types of questions to be supported. So, a lot of funding bodies have a certain idea of what an impact means, or what it means to have... I mean, I think "impact" is really the main thing there, but, you know, I don't have tons of experience with working with funding bodies, so maybe I'm talking out of turn, but the types of questions that are raised that have really interesting and innovative implications for how we see colonialism, how we see raise, how we do work around solidarity, international work, may not be the first work to be funded with, you know, backing or support. In a similar way, I think universities are under pressure to not support the Humanities in a way that they might support Business or Law or other topics, which also means that areas within the Humanities, like Black Studies programmes or like programmes that focus on looking at history critically, you know, Postcolonial Studies, things like that might also not get funded as much, and that kind of research is really important for helping us re-conceive of higher education. So, I think that funding and support needs to be a lot more secure in order to make sure that we're making the most of institutions that could do race-related educational research.

Kyra: Do you feel like involvement in anti-racist and/or decolonial programmes or training



should be kind of compulsory for like lecturers and teaching staff in universities?

Eddie: Um...I think anti-racism is a pretty requisite value in higher education. But do I think that all teaching staff are currently equipped to deliver anti-racist programming? Probably not. I don't think all teaching staff are currently...able – let me just put it that way! I think that...in terms of the delivery – but in terms of whether staff need to all confront the way that educational institutions, and even their own syllabi, reproduce racism and colonialism, yeah, I think that should be compulsory. And I think maybe, eventually, we'd all be in a position where, you know, all teachers and staff who are teaching anywhere could contribute to some anti-racist programming in education. I just feel like we're probably just not there yet, where everyone would be trusted with this material, because it's not that anyone can just get up and deliver the material. It's highly theoretical. Some of it is very, you know, disciplinarily embedded. It takes skill. And I think that is one of the things you mentioned about staff of colour being left to do some of the work of...things that we need more funding for. I think things like developing curriculum that is anti-racist but is not only something like delivering, you know, anti-bias training or something like that, it's a skillset and it's a whole body of knowledge and literature, and I think that needs to be...that needs to be accounted for before staff should be made to teach these things, because they're just not equipped. Yeah.

Kyra: Thank you. And I think, on top of like that, I think there's like this...especially in the UK, like there's still this kind of tension between people considering kind of anti-racist and decolonial work as related to like equality, diversity and inclusion work, and I think there's like the...there's not that clear distinction between the two in some institutions. What are your thoughts on that?

Eddie: Yeah, I think that's absolutely right. I think...I think some institutions... You know, institutions are made of actors that have opinions as well, so I don't want to just frame this as a monolithic institutional posture, but I think it's very easy for institutions to rely on this idea that anything that has to do with race can just be done by checking a few boxes, and, as long as there's like the legitimacy that's given to that programme by having some people of colour take part in it, fine. But then, once we start thinking about all of the different, you know, disciplines and bodies of literature and theoretical perspectives involved in that, it becomes a different proposition because then we realise that you have to really handle it with care. It needs to speak to a lot of different aspects of...of race, colonialism, but also how we think about time, how we think about history, how we think about the politics of education, citation practices – all of the things that go into creating a real, you know, meaningful engagement with the topics of race, beyond simply the inclusion and diversity agenda, which I think can be sometimes distracting from the real, meaningful issues. I think that is a posture institutions sometimes just fall back on, and it doesn't work – you know, it doesn't work to conflate those things at all. It actually makes things worse because then...it undermines the project of doing real, meaningful work on race.

Kyra: Absolutely. I wanted to also jump back to talking about kind of Law curricula



specifically. What forms of coloniality have you noticed in the studying and teaching of Law?

Eddie: I think legal scholarship in the United Kingdom is a broader body of literature than in Continental Europe, for the most part, and I just draw that distinction because I think, in the UK, in Law Faculties, you're more likely to see interdisciplinary work, you know, a lot in Social Sciences, so Sociolegal Studies, Law in Literature, Law in Philosophy, Law in Policy, and I think that's really important, and it's a step towards what I think needs to be addressed within Law curricula more generally because, when you're...when you're in Law School and you're training to be a lawyer, the conventional way of teaching Law is to teach what the judges say, like case law in the UK, legal principles. It's not necessarily conventional or mandatory to learn about the law in context in as much detail as you learn about the law on paper, coming from judges, as kind of a closed circuit system. That's maybe an over- dramatisation, but what I mean to say is that you can go through Law School, in a lot of places, and come out on the other end of it thinking that, you know, Law is basically kind of a science – you know kind of the parameters of what's realistic to expect from these institutions, and you can have tunnel- vision around what that is. But I think a better way, and maybe a way that doesn't reproduce, potentially, the power dynamics that are invested in legal institutions, is to think about the law as one of various institutions and sets of practices and...knowledge practices really, and that it's always in context and it's always being produced, and producing effects, in conjunction with other social processes. So, learning about the law in context, being able to question the law and the role of the law, not only from a strategic perspective but one from the perspective of morals and ethics, when we're thinking about social change more generally, and to think about the question of "should" - rather than just the question of what's legal, thinking of the question of, you know, "What do we want from society?" Sometimes law isn't the answer, and I think a good lawyer knows that and understands that law isn't really...the way to understand moral behaviour in society. You know, slavery was legal. Lots of things are illegal that should probably be legal. And, you know, more and more, we're seeing that abolition, like prison abolition, abolition of police, those types of arguments are reasoned in a way that's actually focused on the materiality and the morals of our lived experience, [particularly/not really] on what should be thought to be the most well-reasoned legal response, because it responds to questions that the law isn't addressing. So, I think, you know, the proposition of learning law the way that we currently learn law helps us not to see some of the questions that a decolonial approach might be interested in.

And one example, I guess, as well, is, when you learn International Law, for example, you might find a conventional syllabus that only looks at, you know, the treaties that have been drawn up and what they say and what they intend to do, rather than looking at how, you know, different power relationships between different peoples and different nations produced a situation where we have a treaty that says a certain thing and what that means, or principles in law being developed out of colonial relationships. That type of teaching of history – and there's kind of a movement within scholarship of International Law called Third-World Approaches to International Law, TWAIL, that, for example, provides a set of counter-narratives to conventional ideas about International Law is, from



perspectives of...from perspectives that look at power as a central part of the creation of law. So, I think that kind of teaching isn't conventional on syllabi and it should be.

Kyra: Do you feel like it's possible to decolonise Law curricula when legal systems continue to kind of reinforce colonial and racist kind of ideologies and practices, or do you feel like...do you feel like it makes it even more important to decolonise Law curricula because of that?

Eddie: I think it is important to...to...to try to decolonise the curriculum of Law. I do know that there are limits. You know, there are limits to what...what adjusting or amending the curriculum can do, and I think... how we conceive of decolonising the curriculum can make a big difference on the impacts that it has, but, at the end of the day, I think, you know, maybe a bigger question is whether we are changing the curriculum around but leaving most of the way that we teach and think about knowledge-production and think about the role of law...leaving that intact. That's one way to think of decolonising the curriculum, and I have a fear that...because decolonising the curriculum has become institutionalised in so many places, and it's become kind of a check-box exercise in some ways, that might simply become something like diversity and inclusion, where, as long as you have a few scholars of colour on your syllabus, you're seen to have addressed the issue of decolonising the curriculum. I think that that, you know, that's a fear of mine, and the danger that implies that, once it's done, the box is checked.

But I think the bigger potential is to think of decolonisation of education as being an ongoing process that is never really over. It's always something that just has to be considered. It's about understanding that colonial logics, and logics of racism, and intersectional forms of racism, so of course thinking about gender, thinking about gender identity, thinking about, you know, religion or nationality, you know, those all have a place in us considering what knowledge we are valuing in education. So, if we're doing that on a constant basis, the optimistic side of me thinks that we...we won't be able to help but reform in some meaningful way how we education and what knowledge we are valuing. But we have to do that consciously and we have to do it consistently and kind of on an ongoing basis – I think that's the only way that it will make a real difference.

Kyra: So, what do you feel like lecturers can do to decolonise their pedagogy and practice – like do you have any kind of specific methods of your own that you could share?

Eddie: Yeah. I think, you know, I think one thing is to interrogate what we're already doing because then we can...we can also, maybe, if we're critical enough with ourselves, we can understand how we're already reproducing some of the exclusions that exist in higher education. And I think that we – I say "we" because I think, even if we think we're doing a good job, we can always...we can always look at our own materials, and I think we'll notice, you know, who we're teaching may reflect, you know, either those with lots of access, who have gotten, you know, their books to be distributed in such a way that those are the ones you come across, and so it might be about – and for me, it's been about trying to dig deeper into the literature to see what voices are there but are being under-represented or



under- played, even though they're contributing quite innovative and interesting things to a certain debate.

So, it's not just about selecting people of colour because they're people of colour, but rather noticing how there are people of colour saying really important, crucial things for a given debate that may be marginalised for various other reasons, and are generally under-represented in certain academic disciplines – so that it makes sense for those who are teaching a certain subject to really do the work to look at voices that are not the first ones that they'll find when they go to the...to the library to kind of do work for their syllabus.

To also look at literature that takes seriously the impacts of racism and colonialism in society, and that means, you know, not necessarily to...only gravitate towards readings of a syllabus that mention something cursorily but then it's just kind of a blip on the...on the radar of this author, but rather to think about voices that centre a certain discussion on race and colonialism in order to make sure that there's a way of using that really important aspect of our lived experience and our theoretical investments as a lens. So, for example, my colleague, Nadine El-Enani wrote this book, "Bordering Britain", where she's talking about immigration law and the processes of...or the history of immigration laws in the UK through the lens of colonialism, and because that's not the way that most Law students will learn immigration law, it's a useful intervention because then it's asking "So, what if we thought about immigration law through the lens of colonialism, what does that reveal to us about the law?" and that's a really important step that I think treats decolonising the curriculum as a theoretically rigorous concept rather than a representational one.

Kyra: And as a lecturer, how do you feel like students can kind of help?

Eddie: Well, I think students are...you know, students are offering, in a lot of ways, with their feedback and with what they want from the curriculum, their demands for the curriculum, guidance on what might help them to learn better and what they might be interested...what might get their interest to allow them to access certain topics. So, it might be realising that students want to hear more about a particular story, and kind of engaging...engaging that story more in teaching. Students can input a lot into what makes it onto syllabi if...I mean quite a lot, if they...can point to literature or ideas that they want to know about within a certain topic. I think the one problem is that the way that we access student feedback is usually after the fact – it's usually after a student has taken a class. By that point, the student may or may not want to give their time to kind of go into a lot of detail brainstorming, and it doesn't really necessarily help to ask detailed questions about parts of the syllabus after the fact. I think one way to engage student input as to what they would want to hear, and in what format they want to hear it, is to build in those questions about what students want into the class. Because I think, at those touchpoints where we're learning about a certain principle in International Law, and the educator might have thought that there are three different cases that talk about those, one of those cases might be really within what students want to hear and it might address issues of race of coloniality in a bit more detail or more explicitly or with more prominence or whatever, and I think it's worth



getting feedback from students as the courses go along as to what they want and what might help them to engage with these ideas better.

I also, you know, I also think that students are sometimes thinking outside of the box in ways that academics sometimes aren't because we're used to – sometimes, academics teach the same class, maybe with small changes, for years and years, and each group of students is different and might have a different reaction to some of the literature on the syllabus but also the assessment types. So, how students engage with certain modes of being assessed is as much, I think, a part of the discussion of decolonising the curriculum as what's on the syllabus because it's about how we expect knowledge to be understood and what forms the exercise for...for assessment takes, and I think that's...you know, these formal relationships that we have between, you know, the learner and the institution, I think are all open for review in this concept of decolonising.

Kyra: Absolutely. As a student, I love that idea of being able to offer feedback like while the course is happening and not just, yeah, at the end of term – yeah, I think it's really important to have those, have that response as well from students too. And, Eddie, you have developed a postgraduate level course called Race, Law & Literature, which you now offer and teach at Birkbeck. How long has that course been running, and can you give us some idea as to what it's about?

Eddie: Yeah, sure. It's been running for...I think...four years, but it didn't run for one of those years, so I've taught it three times. It's...you know, it's my favourite course to teach, just because I get to read what I'm assigning and it's stuff that I really love! And I developed it basically because I felt like there was a conversation that students would be interested in having, that I was interested in having, at the intersection of Law...but law in a broad sense, so not only law as in cases that get decided, but also how we think about the relationship between citizens and the state, how we think about the history of certain laws, including colonialism, including transatlantic slavery, and included the way that we think about the regulation of [identity in bodies]. So, law in that kind of general sense, and literature, which I think also for me is broader than simply prose fiction – you know, it's short fiction, it's novels, it's essays that are creatively written, it's memoirs, it's poetry, thinking about how...authors and artists, creatives, engage with these concepts of law and regulation and history and memory in their works, and how there's this...this kind of...dialogue or this co-production between legal forms of writing and literary forms of writing. There's a lot of...there are a lot of ways to think about them theoretically together, so I won't say that, you know, Law is over here and Literature is over there. There's a lot more complexity in the relationship. But then, race, as a central format for thinking through these complexities, I think is really quite interesting to me because it's hard to read, you know, Tony Morrison and to think about race and not think about the laws that empowered or protected perpetrators of racial violence during the post-slavery era in America, thinking about [a lot of it], or to think about the history of indentured labour and British colonialism, it's hard to read a novel about it, like 'A Sea of Poppies' by Amitav Ghosh, without thinking about the law and policy that structured indentured labour and movements of...you know, over a million South-Asians to the Caribbean, for example. So,



that discussion is really important to me.

And then, on the flip-side, it's really useful to hear what Law students think of literary approaches to understanding history that are haunted by the legal cases that they might have read, and how legal histories don't necessarily capture all of the different ethical and moral questions that are raised in a creatively written piece. I really like to have these discussions with – it's not only Law students who take the class, but I really like to have these discussions with...with students who don't feel like they are trained in reading literature because then they realise that there are a lot of skills from their legal backgrounds that they can bring to reading literature. And they are outside of their comfort zones, but they feel like they're really advancing in thinking through these moral and ethical questions because they're not only framed by the law, they're framed by a whole world of other considerations that they can be freer in thinking about.

Kyra: And in the abstract of the course, you say how literature can kind of stand in for and provide creative alternatives to the law – what did you mean by that?

Eddie: I think I might have, you know, I might be over-stating there whether literature is an alternative to law. I think, you know, I end up teaching that it's not either one or the other, but when I conceived of the course, I did think that Literature is a discipline that demands a certain set of...a certain type of engagement from students of Literature and from readers of literature. There's a different...measure on what's persuasive and what's beautiful. So, beauty in literature is of very high value because it's artistic and creative production that makes in persuasive. In law, there's also a type of beauty – I mean, if we want to be [laughing]...I think lawyers think of it as beauty because it's craft, it's a different type of writing craft, an argumentative craft. But I think, for me, the parameters of the literary craft allow and demand a different type of reading and different type of attention – to read between the lines, to understand metaphor, to understand suggestion – to allow a ghost to physically enter the space and be okay with that, you know, like, “Okay, there's a ghost here”, and now we're going to keep reading and find out what happens; whereas, in legal writing, the possibilities are different.

There's...one might argue it's much more literal, but then, if you read some literature and then come back to the law, and you're in that zone of having to read between the lines and think about metaphor and think about strategy, think about stepping back and seeing what the writer was trying to get the audience to feel or to do, then I think those skillsets are a lot more aligned, and you can bring that literary reader perspective to reading the law, and try to understand it as a craft, as a way to persuade, and also thereby understand its limitations at being able to address certain things because there are certain questions that are being kept out for a reason. So, yeah, I think it's...it is an alternative literature in a certain way, in that sense.

Kyra: We are coming to the end of this interview, unfortunately, but as a question I like to end on: what is something you'd like to see happen or see develop within higher education in the next 10 years?



Eddie: Well, I think, you know, higher education is changing so much, and not least of all because of the pandemic, and learning in a more flexible way I think is probably going to be something that learners demand in the future. But I think one of the...one of the fears that I have, also, other side of it is the hope, that learning doesn't become...something that's divorced from a real, theoretical and reflective, and continual, engagement with kind of core ideas about power, really. So, I think, you know, the worst thing that could happen is that learning becomes a lot more kind of bite-sized in the sense that there's like a strict limit put on what can be offered and therefore how students can engage critically with ideas that go deeper into a certain topic. So, if learning gets truncated and doesn't allow students to then do further research and investigate on their own, I think that would be a downside of what possibly is kind of learning more flexibly in the future. But I think we have an opportunity in the next 10 years to really, through things like decolonising the curriculum and through thinking about what we want universities to do, we have an opportunity to make sure that the Arts and Humanities are protected, for example, and not simply reduced down because...because, economically, you know, there's the idea that vocationally-oriented courses are more important. Of course, I mean, those considerations are important, but I think we have an opportunity to make sure that we hold onto these really...these disciplines that really get learners to think critically and independently and in a really nuanced way, and I think that's what I want to see kind of...in the next 10 years, I would love to see that become a much more apparent commitment of higher education.

Kyra: Thank you so much, Eddie. What a nice way to bring the interview to a close. I just want to thank you again for joining me on this episode of the podcast. It's been nice getting to know a bit more about yourself and having the opportunity to discuss the work you're doing at university and outside as well, so, yeah, thank you again!

Eddie: Thanks so much, Kyra. It's nice to be with you virtually, and, yeah, maybe I'll see you one day in person!

Kyra: Yes, absolutely – thank you!

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