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Podcast transcript:

Kyra: Hi everyone, welcome back to the podcast. The Decolonising Fashion Society is a community of fashion students and creatives committed to raising questions about coloniality in the context of fashion and creating safe spaces where these conversations can be held. The society is based at Central St Martin's, a college at the University of the Arts, London. In this episode, I'm in conversation with members Sahara, Alex, Carmen, Yiling and Melody, where we discuss their upbringings and academic backgrounds, the society itself and what it means for them, but also what it means to decolonise fashion as a colonial discipline. To find out more information about the Decolonising Fashion Society and our guests individually, check the episode description or visit the Pedagogies for Social Justice website.

Would you each like to kind of tell us like where you grew up and where you are currently?

Yiling: I guess I can start. Hello. My name is Yiling. I was born in China, grew up in Beijing, but I've lived in quite many places – Kentucky, [?] and now London. I can't say I was ever anywhere for more than a few years at a time, but that's part of how, you know, I can incorporate this into some of the topics we'll be talking about today. And I go to CSM, studying Fashion Communications & Promotion.

Melody: Hi, my name is Melody and I go by she/her/they and I come from a mixed background. So, my mother is Mongolian and my father is Scottish, so I grew up in a tiny Scottish town, and I'm currently based in London.

Alex: Hi, I'm Alex. I go by she/her. I was born and raised in the Warwickshire countryside of England. I went to CSM but now I'm studying my Master's degree at Warwick University, which is a complete and utter change for me. So, I'm sure that we'll go into that a bit more later, but, yeah, that's me.

Carmen: Yeah, hi, I go by she/her. I'm Spanish. I come from the Canary Islands, actually, from Lanzarote, but I grew up in Madrid, and, yeah, my family is all Spanish so yeah [laughing]. I just graduated from the [?] Fashion Critical Studies at CSM, Central St Martin's, so…

Sahara: Hi, I'm Sahara. I also just finished Fashion Critical Studies. My family comes from Dutch India so it's like very near the border of Pakistan and the West, but we also have a lot of history in East Africa, and then I was born here, in London, and then I spent about five years of my teens in India, and I also went to university in the Netherlands, so I, like Yiling, kind of don't stay in one place for too long and I try and like…have certain elements of all the different cultures that I go to with me that I like and sort of make my own new identity.

Kyra: So, I guess, how would you describe like your upbringing in terms of how race was seen and felt in your household? I feel like, all of you coming from so many different like contexts, like it must be so different for each of you…

Yiling: I feel like I was definitely brought up at home, like by my parents, in a very sort of mono-minded, very mono-culturally-minded space, but, every single day, we leave the home, we go to classes, and this is where I started to feel that there was a huge disparity between my…my actions and the way that I would behave at home versus when I had to be social. It didn't really help with my social life, with finding friends. Definitely, when travelling between home and China, and then going back to receive a Western education, was a very confusing experience, and, every day, I can understand a bit more about the context as to how my parents' upbringing was very different from mine and it only adds understanding now for how we can communicate with one another, but it was definitely very single-minded. I have quite a number of experiences of…ignorance that was just shadowed racism, em, being projected from my parents, but that never trickled down too far into how I would behave with other people.

Melody: Yeah, in response to the same question, I would say, growing up in a mixed household, it was really difficult for me, actually, growing in the 2000s in a small Scottish town. Racism was definitely like an everyday experience for me, but that was always very much…like…cast as like, oh, kids being kids, and I felt really frustrated a lot of the time because neither of my parents could quite understand this…what I was experiencing because, you know, my mother had never experienced – she felt…yeah, she experienced coming to this country but not necessarily racism growing up here, and my father is white and Scottish so he didn't relate to it the same, but I think they supported me as much as they could. But, absolutely, I think the way that I grew up, as usually the only person of colour in the room, like always [half-laughing], has impacted the way I interact and navigate the world today.

Alex: So, yeah, I was born…well, I was born into a white English family, and I very much grew up in a very white part of the Midlands, of the UK. People call it "the Shires" and it really did feel like that. I mean, obviously, race was huge, huge part of that upbringing, but, verbally, race was pretty much completely silent for me, growing up. Really, when I was preparing for this, I was really trying to think of like instances where my teachers or my parents or kind of like older figures might have actually directly confronted me with concerns about race or trying to engage with race, and I really cannot remember any of that ever happening. I grew up in very, very white spaces, and that's definitely been a huge part of…of my memory of my upbringing.

Carmen: I feel like a little bit like Alex. It's very different because, for example, I, my first part, until I was 10, I grew up in the Canary Islands, in Lanzarote, and I feel like that, compared to Madrid, is very different in terms of race. For example, I went to a British school, so I was with people from India, people from the UK. And then, also, there are many South American and many North African immigrants in Lanzarote, and I feel…like because it's such a small island, we are more closer together. Then, when I came to Madrid, I was predominantly in a white space, like 100%, all my teenage years, but even now that I even see it even in university, which was public and still felt quite very much white, so I think I now have been [reflected….] since [being in] my twenties because, obviously, in my household, like everyone, you know, like the message is always everyone is equal, it don't matter where you come from. My mother grew up in Africa, in North Africa, in the Sahara, but obviously she grew up there because of…because my…my granddad was like a soldier in…in the occupied space of the Sahara. So, it's very complicated and, even though I grew up like with very…like parents very open and, you know, everyone is the same, it's true that…that is not enough of a message because obviously the world doesn't roll like that and I think that it's like a very… white message, even though it comes from love, you know, and…and respect. So, yeah, very complicated to see your upbringing.

Sahara: That's so interesting because I've studied with Carmen for a year and I didn't know that, so I'm learning as well [laughing] – it's lovely! So, for me, I would say that…I was quite lucky. I recently spoke to a South Asian who grew up in the US and he was telling me that he felt a lot more othered than I did because there was quite a large sort of Indian, South-Asian community in the UK, and when I was young, I actually went to a Hindu school for quite a few years. But I was also keenly aware that I was different, and my mother had sort of made sure to explain to me how these dynamics worked. But I was quite fortunate in that, until maybe my teenage years, I didn't have experiences of like malicious racism. But there is also this issue, obviously, of like a diaspora third culture kid where you're… In England, I'm kind of the India, and in India, I'm the British girl, so I like feel accepted but also still somewhat alienated in both spheres, essentially.

Kyra: What were you guys watching and reading growing up? What kind of representations were you exposed to?

Yiling: So, a funny thing that I always, em, say as the first piece of English media I was watching is that I actually learned English from watching Bambi every single morning. I would wake up, I would go to the TV and put in the DVD, every single morning when I first moved to the States, and I just don't know why I was so obsessed with it, but anyway, in my teenage years, I…mm…never really felt very cultured, growing up, because I didn't relate to pop culture that other peers from my schools and classes were consuming. At that time, I didn't really hang out with people outside of school, so I only could hear the conversations that they were having, and I…em… I also had, in school, I also had a few undiagnosed learning disabilities, so I never understood why I couldn't finish reading a book, for example, or why I couldn't sit long enough to finish through a TV show, and so I was never able to relate with anyone on…on almost any of the media they were consuming, and so, living in like kind of closed off rural places, just a bit too far away from cities, I think I spent a lot of time on my own. I was an only child. So, the world that I knew was really small, and I couldn't relate to anything in my immediate vicinity, and I feel like that's really hindered my growth as a person and it makes me a lot more grateful now, eventually, or even back then when I discovered the internet and online communities, so, I don't know, I became a Tumblr girlie for a bit, but never really related to what was around me.

Melody: I was definitely a Tumblr also [laughing], […] there. Yeah, growing up in Scotland, I definitely realised that I gravitated towards the sort of, em, [BOC] representation that I could get in Scotland, I mean, but that was very, very limited to mainstream pop culture. So, like, for example, I named my teddy-bear after Beyonce [laughing] like…because, for me, it was like, oh my god, Beyonce is like not white and she's amazing and that's kind of like me! But like I was looking at like America's Next Top Model and I loved like Naomi Campbell, Tyra Banks, and then, you know… But then like…growing up more, yeah, I really sort of gravitated towards like…shows like Fresh Prince, for some reason. I was obsessed, and then, naturally, I got into hip-hop and a lot of… Yeah, when I looking back and thinking about this question, I realised that…I really hated a lot of East Asian representation within the UK and I did not – and I still, to this day, don't identify with many like people at all, and I can't name you even like three East Asian people in the media that I actually, you know, admire, but em…yeah.. So, actually, I actually really actively distanced myself from stereotypical Asian characters that I saw in the media, so that's also part of why I'm trying so hard to decolonise myself because, growing up, I tried so hard to not be the stereotypical Asian that I saw in like TV shows or in anime or in… Yeah, I think it's so important these days, for sure.

Alex: For me, at home, I'd say, until I was a teenager, I very much was influenced by what my parents watched on TV. I was an only child and I was very obsessed with like being an adult

really, really quickly, and so I would always watch TV with my dad. My dad was obsessed with white American western cowboy movies, like it was…it was all over that. My soundtrack was definitely like Avril Levine, Nickelback, kind of this very white 2010 sort of music era. And then I do…I love that Melody just brought up Fresh Prince because I have a very clear memory of Fresh Prince becoming super, super cool when I was about 13, and I remember watching it for the first time and…it was just like the coolest thing and I definitely remember that as one of my own first encounters with race in popular culture, and it definitely made me realise that the protagonists of that show weren't the protagonists that kind of dominated the popular culture that I had been engaging with, as someone white growing up in like a kind of white suburban place and what my friends were talking about and everything. Fresh Prince kind of resurging into popular culture in like the 2010s was definitely a real moment for me.

Carmen: Yeah, so interesting because I kind of relate to [a mix of] Melody and Alex in terms of like [rural] culture. I think, like for example, like going to the British school opened like the frontiers a little bit. Even though like it has a lot of colonial implications on it, I was exposed like for example to MTV, which I was not exposed in Madrid, and even like watching hip-hop, what you were saying, Melody, like Beyonce, all of these groups that were not as popular in Spain, because I feel like, even now, today, like the music is very different, even though we are like very much a globalised world. So, I think those types of music, hip-hop, club, which I grew to love, shows like the Prince of Bel Air, but even like [R?] on the Disney channel, things like that, really, compared to what I then grew up in Madrid, like it was very much like Spanish TV shows where there's only one South American or Latino character, there's no black characters, there's no Arab or Muslim characters whatsoever, I think that really like… that's [taken with] me, really opened my eyes a lot. So, yeah, I think that, even though…even like I relate to Alex, like I'm also an only child and my parents…I would see what my parents would see, and it was like the typical family type of like comedy shows or whatever that were predominantly all Spanish and all white. But, yeah, thanks to those influences that I had like from the British school, I still saw another world like outside of like the main Spanish idea.

Sahara: I really love this question, just because it's a really insightful, interesting question, but also because I'm learning so much about people who I've spent so much time with already [laughing]! Like I also loved Fresh Prince, growing up, so I'm like what is this random commonality we didn't know that we had [laughing]?! I also really like this question because I actually have like this sort of mental list in my head of things I would show my possible future children, and there are very few things on this list. One of the only things that's on it is [Avatar Blast ?], the cartoon, just because I feel like it's such an incredible show, like it tackles so many incredible…the very sort of difficult, hard subjects in a way that children can comprehend, and I'm a big fan of that kind of media that can tackle difficult issues like bereavement or war or imperialism, but in a way that's digestible to children. And I'm really

fortunate because I think my mother was of the same philosophy. So, she grew up, for context, in Nairobi, in a very poor household, and one of her [means of escape, one of her] refuges, em, also because she had a lot of difficulties growing up with her [neuro-diversity] and sort of being alienated, was reading, and she told me when…even when I was quite young, she was like, "Yeah, all I read when I was young was sort of like Enid Blyton or like Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights", like all things by white women, and she would read about this world that just was not hers, and so she made such an active effort… I literally texted her about this question, being like, "Tell me some of the things that I read" and then she reminded me and I had so many memories. There was like…she made sure I would get sort of fairy tales or stories from all over the world, which I'm so grateful for, and so I think I was sort of just in my own world growing up, but I do definitely remember, obviously I grew up here for the first few years of my life, and I would look around and I'd be like…these people don't look like me, and I would also sort of distance myself from the very sort of…reductive South Asian, Indian stereotypes of just like, oh yeah, they're all backward, they all have these like forced marriages, they're all super-conservative, and I would always try and tell my friends like that's not us. We're very open – at least my family is. And I do remember, when I moved to India, I was like, oh, there are more people that look like me! But then, at the same time, I was sort of saddened that there was a lot of colourism in the media in India. I think that's changing now. But, yeah, I would say that it's a very mixed answer for me, but I hope that is clear enough…

Kyra: And I guess that leads to kind of like my next question, which is, I guess, how did you all come into fashion, and I guess specifically thinking about race in relation to kind of fashion as well, and that kind of like critical eye, like I'm really interested to hear…?

Yiling: Yeah. So, I think that…for myself, it was something that I enjoyed and that I was good at, which is to be a creative problem-solver, you know, live a life of fabulousness and dynamicness, you know. This kind of thing is…there wasn't a lot of things I was very good at growing up, but this, creative problem-solving - and it can expand into very many different things – I was good at, and I was very lucky and privileged that my parents were very understanding and I was able to pursue this. What was your second question, by the way?

Kyra: When did you start thinking critically about race in the context of fashion?

Yiling: Exactly. So, exactly as I was saying, I was able to finally move away from quite closed off spaces and just to be surrounded by…cultural agility. I don't know if this is a thing, but I like to describe it as that. I feel like…begun my never-ended inquiry on…my own experience of understanding displaced cultural identity, and, also, I didn't even learn what diaspora meant really until I became [an adult, didn't think about that], so it's all very… It became a

very new exploration after I moved to London four years ago and meeting people who I learned from to unblock my chi and then people who I can actually have conversations about, you know, like transnationalism and queer Chinese politics, em, in art, in life, in fashionable life, and em…yeah, to…to put those thoughts together and even recognise when I'm unconsciously like gatekeeping me or my [?] close ones from our own table [laughing] and to really decolonise my own mind. I…I have always been studying Fashion in university, but outside of that, I started to engage a lot in events curation, and when I started my journey with that, sort of thinking critically about race and representation within it because when… I was looking to find spaces and groups of people who were also trying to help people to heal or understand this world we are living in, and I ended up, at first, gravitating towards…towards what we can now call…has been coined the wellness industry, and then I… I soon found it being predominantly white and very, very, very privileged. Another thing that also started my exploration of race in fashion was, when I entered university, I saw a real segregatedness of Asian people in university spaces, be it a cultural barrier or a language barrier, but this was quite uncomfortable for me because I was able to integrate myself. I speak English very well, although I can't say that I feel the same level of comfort at all from my friends who…would have immigrated a bit later in life or have come to the UK for university.

Melody: Yeah, I think, for me, when I…I started thinking critically about race very early because, you know, with growing up in Scotland, again, as like normally the only ever non-white person in the room [laughing], like…I think, for me, the snow really fell off the roof, to quote Malcolm X, during like a History class where we learned about Emmett Till, this like very famous story, and I like literally ran out the room crying, and I remember like that striking me like…to my core, and I remember also being quite shocked that other students didn't seem to be impacted by that story as much as I did, and that's when like, for me, I was like…oh, this is like…I finally have the language to be able to describe like what race is, because, before, I used to think of racism as just bullying, all these racist remarks that I used to get. But then it…yeah, I used to think, oh that's brilliant because just…that's me as a person, they don't like me, but then, to be able to say and label it as racism, that was a huge moment for me. So, when I think about that in the context of fashion, I always saw fashion as a tool to construct my identity, to protect myself, and to have agency and ownership about how I showed up and how I present myself. Rather than just being me and my race, I was able to alter and tailor that to suit however I wanted to be seen [laughing]. So, that's what, ultimately, I think, led me to study Fashion Design for my BA, and then I worked for a while in the industry and studied Fashion & Communication for my MA. Yeah, so now, here we are [laughing], and we're at the Decolonising Fashion Society!

Alex: For me, I definitely wanted to…to go and study fashion or became interested in fashion from, to be honest, a very simple love of beautiful things, just loving touching and feeling and engaging with a beautiful object. It's…perhaps embarrassing but the fact of it is is I did

not start thinking about fashion in terms of race until I got to Central St Martin's. I'm sure that there were many factors in that, not just the curriculum, but the whole experience of there was definitely very transformative for me in that area.

Carmen: So, for me, I studied actually [?] for my degree and…even though I've always loved fashion, it was then like that I started working in fashion after my BA, and I think like, critically, not in terms exactly of fashion, but I remember critically thinking about race, I remember going on Erasmus to the north of France and, I don't know why, but like, living in Spain, I felt like going to France as an Erasmus, it was going to be like, you know, the liberté, egalité [laughing] and all these things, and I saw it more like…a more open society. But, obviously, I arrived there and I was like…compared to my university in Spain, I was, for the first time, with more people that were like, you know, not white and Spanish, like it was very open and very international, the university, and I remember, like the first weeks, I felt like, wow, this is so amazing, but then I started seeing that it was actually so divided and so segregated and it really like broke like a little bit…I'm going to say my heart but like I was like…you know this idea that you think of the world and actually it doesn't correspond, and especially when you see people your age that feel segregated and… Yeah, I don't know, I…it changed me a lot. And also, even there, I was introduced to some feminist academics, […], so I think I started getting into that. So, yeah, I started critically thinking about race like probably that year on my Erasmus in France, and then I [prolongated] a little bit, and that was when, in my fourth year of my degree, when I came back, there were only two subjects that were like non-Western Art History subjects, and I took one of them that was South Asian Studies, which was like four months or whatever, but, yeah, there, I got even more introduced to theory. So, yeah… And then, in Fashion, obviously, in CSM, like [….], it's very much from decolonising studies so, yeah, there, I learned a lot.

Sahara: For me, when I first started thinking critically about race, I was quite young. So, as I mentioned, I obviously grew up in quite a Hindu community, but I do remember…there's a polarising discussion among many people who know me as to whether I look Indian or not, and some people think like, oh yeah, you completely look very Indian, and other times, I've been sort of thought of as [white passing] or Mediterranean or South American, and I had this experience, as a child, a white person in the summer camp that I went to I think just saying, "Oh yeah, but you're normal, you're the same as me…" and I was like, ah, I don't know if that's quite true, but I didn't really know how to express that. And then, in terms of my interest in fashion, I've always been super-interested in image, but also just beautiful things, like Alex said, but how image and fashion culture and various types of aesthetics can be political or have impacts on culture. But I never really knew that I could study that…and then I discovered that I could at CSM and hence here I am. But, yeah, I think it was sort of in my late teens where I really started to understand representation and images and all of the various dynamics that are involved in that.

Kyra: I guess going to like CSM, to me anyway, like I see it as like a really like prestigious kind of institution to study Fashion. I've heard from people's experience like it's not easy to get into CSM. So, I'm just thinking, did you kind of feel like there was pressure on you in that sense, like going into this institution? How were you able to kind of like navigate it upon entering the institution, and I guess when did your opinion of CSM change, if it did?

Yiling: I felt like the process of deciding I wanted to come to CSM was very streamline and… my application was very smooth. It was the only university that I applied for and, for some reason, I just thought that this is the place that I needed to go and then so I did not give other options any thought, and of course it went that way because it was manifested or it was just the way that I had always seen it in my head. But I welcomed any pressure that I may have felt from…maybe I've heard, yes, it is prestigious, it is this or that, but I welcomed it with open arms, and I was so excited to face some challenge and em… I feel like that is why I never felt like I was…there was any turbulence to my opinions of CSM when they did eventually change, after I entered the expectations versus the realities, because that was part of what I welcomed with open arms. I knew I would not know what to expect. I knew that there was going to be an international body of people, and all I wanted to do was to have…open ears.

Melody: Yeah, I mean, I studied BA Fashion Design in Scotland, but I had always wanted to go to CSM, since I saw like the [Wells Bonnar] Show in 2014, I think. But I mean I knew of CSM, you know, McQueen and all these other famous designers who'd gone, and having like done quite a solid grounding within decolonising research and writing my dissertation on the same sort of subjects, I knew that like if…you know, going to CSM, I would still try to apply that decolonial approach. And, I mean, between my BA and MA, I worked as a teacher for a while, so I also came at it from an educational viewpoint, where I was like…I know how the system works and I am going to make the most of it and use my voice and take up space and, yeah, really make the most of everything that the institution offers.

Alex: So, for me, my…neither of my parents had the opportunity to go to university, and so, when I kind of was reaching the end of sixth form and we thought that I might be able to have the opportunity to go, I definitely felt under pressure to pursue something very academic and kind of…make my parents proud and fulfil all of the academic dreams that they didn't have the opportunity to. So, I held an offer for King's College, which I was really proud of, and I ended up actually pulling out, about two weeks before I was supposed to move in, because I just kind of knew in my gut that it wasn't right, and I realised like that I was going to have to start meeting people and like talking to all of these really academic people, and it just didn't feel right for me. So, I kind of ran to my mum and I was like, "I don't think I can do it, it's not right for me", and so I knew that I…I wanted to go to CSM. I studied Fashion History at CSM, which is a very niche degree. For me, it was perfect because it

allowed me to…to become historian, which is what I always knew that I wanted to do, but from such a unique perspective of fashion, and, honestly, only now that I've left CSM and I'm at a much more academic institution, have I actually come to be able to realise the value of Central St Martin's as an institution and everything that it can offer. I think, when I was there, I really…I didn't appreciate it enough [laughing].

Carmen: For me, I would have never in my life thought that I could enter CSM. I even remember…I applied because I was not in a very good space in Spain, and I needed like… I was feeling very sad because I was working in creation and they were…yeah, you know when they want you to really research and bring new ideas but actually, they just want the traditional stuff and maybe some other details…? So, I felt like, at my 25, 26 years old, like so stuck, and I just wanted like to see what would happen if I sent the essay that they required for the entry, or at least the submission of [our name], and then I got in and I was like…I couldn't believe it. So, for me, coming here was like a very big deal. I did feel very much pressure. I felt pressured the whole thing because that's also me, but in a good way. I think like one of the best things that I can take from CSM, apart from everything that we have learned, what we're talking about, like decolonial studies, the challenging the…how you would see the industry is just like taking you…it's… There is like a sense of pride that I at least feel like in just challenging and getting out of your comfort zone and speaking about things that maybe are not the beautiful sides of fashion that everyone loves, but they are so problematic at some times. So, for me, that challenge was…was very brilliant, and I think like, in terms of maybe the…things that could happen that can [show on CSM], it's just like the way that, well, every institution has the challenge of just making progress and I think that is also [viewed], but I also think, in CSM, I also have seen how it's challenged. So, at least, compared to my other university, I have seen a progress and…yeah…

Sahara: For me, I think I might be one of the few people in this group who actually had never even heard of CSM before applying [laughing]. So, I knew that there was just like UAL campus at King's Cross, em, but I didn't really know much about it, and the way I came across it was because, after my BA, I was like I really want to be engaged with fashion in some way – I just don't really know how. And what Carmen and I do is sort of the MA sister course of what Alex did, which is Fashion Critical Studies, and so I found that I…. It was a space where I could engage with the creative, but because I cannot be creative myself, I can sort of analyse and think about it. And, yeah, and so I applied not really thinking much – I was like, if I don't get into this MA, I'll do something else. So, I didn't really have that many expectations, other than this…it was a prestigious institution that, once I'd researched, I was aware of that. So, yeah, that was…my journey. And then, when I arrived, I was a lot…I don't know, I was very impressed at how…not…em… So, for context, my BA in Leiden, it felt a lot more colonial than CSM does. However, with time, I did start to notice that there were some gaps, and so, when Melody approached me with this idea of founding a new society, I was like, oh, this is great because she's got this idea of us making a difference and really having

an impact, which I was a great fan of, and so obviously then we got it off the ground together, which was amazing. But yeah, I would say the main thing that I really value in CSM is also just the people that you meet and the connections that you make, which sounds a bit cliched, but it really is true, not only in friendships but also just industry connections and meeting interesting alumni and the amazing journeys that people have too in terms of their personal journeys and their academic and professional journeys is just amazing to learn from.

Kyra: I mean, it's so nice to hear that you all had like a generally like positive experience. Like everything you knew about it, I guess it didn't necessarily hinder kind of your choice to go there and I guess how you were able to kind of like face those challenges upon entering the institution. Is there anything that you wish you knew as a student that you know now?

Yiling: Yeah, I agree with Carmen that CSM is…it's a bubble, and, absolutely, that [doesn't] mean it can't prepare us for what's coming next, and I think this is such a difficult question because I feel like…I couldn't pick any advice for myself because I really learned from every single time that I failed – not saying I failed a year or anything, but, as many times as we end up making mistakes or end up failing, unless we get hurt or we hurt others inconsequentially in the process, I think that the biggest learning lesson of what we may be taught in a curriculum comes from us starting higher level education as immature people and maturing in the process. So, I wouldn't change any of that.

Melody: Definitely. I think my one piece of advice would be, for me personally, I would tell myself to stop making work that I think that I should be making, and more try and make work that makes sense for me, because I think, for too long, I was trying to make work and pushing myself to be something, again that I think everyone else has said, that I wasn't, in that I was trying to make very conceptional work. But for me, actually, what makes sense is making more work that is accessible, and it's about inclusivity rather than exclusivity. I think I took…I took a while to get to that, and I think that's important for people, especially if you're thinking about coming to CSM, to know that there is a place for absolutely everyone. You don't have to be a very obscure avant-garde artist. You can literally, you know, just be yourself [laughing], honestly!

Alex: For me, if I could go back, I would just tell myself to stop being scared of… Like because it is surrounded such this immense reputation, I definitely spent a good year – I mean, you guys, you only had a year on your MA to like to do that, and I guess I was there for three, so it was…I had a lot more time to learn about it. But I definitely spent a year being afraid and being intimidated, and, actually, now I've left, I realise now how flexible the tutors were, and how approachable they were, and how, if we as a student body felt like there was really

something that we really wanted to be in our curriculum, or there was a guest speaker that we really wanted to have, our tutors were completely open-eared, they were completely open for having, you know, for taking on board our suggestions and for really making…make the university experience something that actually worked for the students. And only now that I've left do I realise that that is not something that most universities do, and most universities, you walk in and the curriculum is what it is and that's…you know, you consume your education like a consumer product. It's not as much that at CSM, in that they will cater for you, they will adapt to you, and I really wish that I'd have learnt that sooner and not been…not been too intimidated and too kind of set in a mindset of, well, they know what they're doing, they're the best. No, you have to speak out and make it what you want to get out of it.

Carmen: Yeah, definitely, I would agree with Alex in the sense of like not feeling intimidated because, also, I think like, at least from experience in this world, like CSM has also been…it's like a place like everyone is quite unique, and it's quite amazing just to sit there and see everyone, people-watching. Even my parents were, the past weekend, in London, and I took them there and they were just like…they thought it was like amazing, like they have never seen such personalities and individuals. But even with that, you may think like maybe I'm just like [?, auto whatever] or I'm not sure if I'm speaking out, like just be very…I don't know, very proud on who you are, on speaking your…what you think, your truth, not feeling intimidated by anything or anyone, because I think it's like a good space in which everyone can really project themselves and develop themselves and even… I mean, I even think sometimes CSM is a little bit of a bubble, you know, it's not really the real world, but now that you are in that bubble, just be yourself and grow within yourself so you are more prepared for what comes next.

Sahara: I think, when I first joined, I really started to, like I mentioned, all of these opportunities that come in that aren't even related to your course, and there's a sense of being overwhelmed, that you want to take all of them, but if you start to take all of them, it's inevitable that you're going to burn yourself out, so you kind of just have to realise that like whatever opportunities you do encounter, you take those, within reason, and you make the best of it, but you also like put yourself first. That was something I really had to learn in the first two terms, I would say.

[Music]

Kyra: So, before we move on, I feel like I have to ask this question, like being in a room basically full of like fashion experts, enthusiasts, historians: what fashion trend, item or practice are you leaving in 2022?

Yiling: I think that…you know, in light of the recent Dior show, I think…do we really need to still be flying out there, everywhere, here and there…? You know, like how cool would it be…? First of all, I do love the light that it brought to Cairo and, you know, it shed beautiful light, it made the plateau very beautiful and opened it to a lot of people online, but how cool would it be if we just had…like skipped the fear of changing what needs to happen at a fashion show and if Dior…even if Dior did choose to do the show in Cairo but the audience was all for journalists based in Giza or Egypt and, you know, North Africans and just completely reinvented that you have to fly out press from everywhere and now you go here and make it exclusive? How cool would it have been if ,just like music, there could have been a huge opening act for…for local artists? I just think that there was a lot of potential there. Ah, so the trend is: do we really need to be flying people out everywhere?

Melody: I'm really struggling with the question because like I find it really difficult to tell people like, oh, that looks, you know, like not the best [laughing]. I think, for me, I'm thinking…I don't know why I'm thinking about this, but I'm thinking about the clean girl aesthetic that I've seen like on TikTok. Like I love the whole…I like…I admire the sort of self-care aspect of it, and the, you know, like, you know, keeping it together, no branding, but like, in terms of that trend, I feel like…oh, I don't know, there is also a little bit of like…I don't know…there's privilege attached to it, and it's kind of in line with this whole, em, like perfect morning routine trend that I've also seen on TikTok. Yeah, I…haven't really thought this through [laughing], but, for me, I'm just very over that.

Alex: I don't know, I think, for me, I'm not a big fan of the Y2K revival [laughing]! I think a lot of people say that. That's just my personal opinion because people often ask me, they're like, "Oh yes, you're Critical Studies, analyse my outfit, criticise my outfit!" and I'm like that's not…that's actually the opposite of what we're supposed to do! We're supposed to…like the idea is, I think, just to do whatever you want and have fun with it. But, yeah, I'm going to not be taking on the low-waisted jean trend anytime soon [laughing]. I'm also just embracing a lot more of like my heritage. I wear a lot more of my own…like jewellery from my heritage, and saris to more special occasions, or, you know, like, em, we call them [chunnis] or dupattas – it's just like a scarf that you can like wear over your head or wear around your neck, and I often put it over my head, just as an aesthetic thing or a comfort thing, some shielding from the elements, and I'm really enjoying sort of blending different styles to make my own modern, yet also ethnic – even thought that word can be problematic – but yeah, my own modern ethnic style, so to speak.

Kyra: That's so cool, yeah. We love an item that has multiple functions.

Alex: I very much agree with that, yeah. I think…it's not so much leaving it behind as I'm going to be taking it with me even more and then leaving behind some of the Y2K revival stuff [laughing].

Carmen: I would say, if it's okay, Melody, I'm a little bit tired of like this idea of…I think it's more like the make-up styles, like the soft glams and the glams and these perfect faces. I just cannot like…I'm just…I mean, I'm not going to say much because everyone deals like with their face and their insecurities how they wish, but, yeah, like the overproducing your face and just transforming it into something that is just not…not you. I don't know, that makes me very sad. And then I always say one thing, like, I don't know why, but posh people in Spain love the UNIQLO vest, you know, and they like…it's just like…please, let's like get over it [laughing], and I…I don't know, it's just like…I don't know, it's like that insistence like…and they like…they wear it as it was like a connection to the country, to the land, to, you know, even hunting and stuff, and it's just like I'm so over it, please just like let's move on, onto the 2022.

Sahara: Yeah. I think I'm just over everything also just being an aesthetic, like giving everything a name. Like can people just like do their think and like…?!

[…]

Melody: Like [academia]…

Sahara: Oh my gosh, yes, yes [laughing].

Kyra: So, obviously, now, I want to also start thinking about the Decolonising Fashion Society, and I wanted to first ask Melody what made you want to kind of even found a society like this, and I guess what was your process like in really bringing it to life?

Melody: Yeah, I mean, honestly, I was really surprised that there wasn't already a society or a space like this, especially at UAL, which is so renowned for fashion. And I knew the sort of ethos and safe space that I was looking for and… I mean, initially, we were even reluctant to call it Decolonising Fashion Society, but I think it's important that we did, and we actually embraced it as part of the work and to face that discomfort that comes with the name, and really attaching everything that we do as a society under the name of Decolonising Fashion

so that there is this greater understanding of what is even meant by the term, so that we can that, through our actions and the work that we do, the definition of what the society is.

Kyra: So, I guess, for everyone else, like what was it about the society that made you want to kind of be involved, and I guess what was your process like in getting into it?

Carmen: I mean, I can go. I mean, I knew it obviously because I go with Sahara to class – well, I used to go with Sahara to class…now, we're finished, and also with Melody, and…and yeah, obviously, through them, I just wanted to supported, and also it was like such a good, em, group, and such a good society, and I even always say this but like even I remember when they put the Instagram and the name, like I always told Sahara and Melody like that I was always shocked that that username was not taken and… You know, you realise, with those things, that…maybe it's a [stupid] thing, I don't know, maybe I'm just making it a big deal, but you realise like how important these societies are. So, yeah, it was through them, through knowing them… And also, it's quite impressive how good they do it, like I'm just going to say like…because they are so…you know, well-spoken in how they promote it and how they do everything, so yeah…

Sahara: I can go. So, essentially, Melody was like…I consider her the beautiful pioneer of this whole idea. She came up to me after we went – we went to a talk, em, and she just said like, "Oh, do you want to be involved in this? I feel like you would really be into this venture…" and I was completely, straightaway, on board. And so, she'd taken care of a lot of a lot of like administrative aspects, but then we sort of came up with ideas together of how to get people involved, and we had a really fun first meeting because she ended up catching Covid so I brought her in online and then we were like organising the snacks and just all these little bits and bobs, and yeah, it was just really fun to think of like what we wanted to do together and how to conceive it. And then we started drawing in people and they can also talk about how they were drawn in…

Yiling: Well, everyone should be involved. It's the now and it's the future. I wanted to and I think that, em, everyone should be.

Kyra: So, I guess, for the audience, like particularly for those that don't necessarily have a background in fashion and think about fashion in their kind of like daily lives, could each kind of maybe just shed some light on some aspects of the fashion industry or fashion culture, which has connections to colonialism or maybe preserves like a colonial way of thinking and being, but is often kind of taken for granted?

Alex: Yiling and I had a really, really great conversation about this the other day because this question sparked so much conversation for us, and we spoke about how, so often, coloniality is kind of seen as something that's quite historical, and when we study it at school and at university, if you study it at all, it's seen as very historical, and fashion, particularly fast fashion, is seen as very "in the now", and so the two don't really seem to collide very much in popular discourse and in academia. So, we both agreed that fast fashion, and how rooted fast fashion is in colonial structures, has to be the best answer to this question, rooted in colonial structures, both in terms of production, in terms of, you know, garment workers on incredibly unfair wages – we all know the [? Plaza] example is referred to all the time, but it needs to keep coming up. There are so many other examples. But not just in fast fashion's production, also in its disposal. I'd really…I read a fantastic article a couple of weeks ago by [Asia Barber]. If you haven't come across her, absolutely go and check her out – she's fantastic. She wrote for Refinery 29 about how… It's Refinery 29, isn't it? I always forget the number! I think it is, yeah. She wrote about fast fashion's disposal and how the, quote/unquote, "Global North" seems to kind of…dispose, or donate, if you like, its fashion waste to the Global South, and really just how colonial that structure is. That definitely needs to be more widely discussed and thought about.

Yiling: And in the small stepping stones it takes to create changes in those areas, it's…a lot of the time, there is an "all or nothing" approach that people like to take when they support or disagree with it, and I find that perhaps to have a lot to do in wishing to keep this institution still exclusive because I feel like…criticism or an inability to want to engage in those stepping stones of like decolonial change taking place is because the small steps are not chic and they're not sensational. You know, it's boring. And I just want to reiterate that exclusivity is not helping with this cause, and to create a really sensational outcome is actually just another good PR for fashion, and really the small steps come with, em, a lot of groundwork that we have to see happening slowly and it's not…as I say, it's not chic. And a very good example of that…I could give is that, at CSM, all Fashion courses do sustainability projects [in itself to] design creative solutions, eh, to the Fashion courses in CSM, we have…we all have sustainability projects, and, this year, in the Fashion courses of second year, which I hear from because […] and the year below me, we had a huge uproar when, em, normally, the LVMH brand that would come in was replaced with UNIQLO for a fashion project this year, recently. And I found that the student disagreement from the UNIQLO project was they wanted to oppose it because they're against the appointing of a high street and fast fashion brand for a sustainability project. [Fair], em… I wanted to do a bit more of my own research into this, and my first question was, well, wait, actually, if we think about who can enjoy cheaper high street options, is it the majority or is it the minority? And I think it shows…we both thought that it showed a lot about what is the reason that most, not all, but most people come to CSM for, em, and when I did my research about what UNIQLO wanted to do, even as a fast fashion brand, which cannot be wholly pure and ethical, is that they genuinely were trying to put in the work to formulate a model under their management that, as I can

recall, can offer people warm, practical, basic clothes suitable for living and trying to, em, do this affordably and trying to update their sustainability model. Right. Very commendable [for my half]. But when I asked some of the Fashion students that wanted to protest against this why they were against it when they think about UNIQLO, I found that some of their answers fell short as it showed me that they probably didn't do the same type of research, or, even if they did, I believe that they had a lack of desire to engage because UNIQLO was not seen as fashionable or as sensational as the LVMH brand. And I feel like the type of work for fashion that can truly change, for the masses, you know, is for people from CSM to want to make these [places] seem desirable, and that's the first step.

Melody: Yeah. A lot of this is ideas just about taking up space and like making sure that students here know that it exists, and, yes, that there are other people thinking about race and fashion within our university, but also doing it in a way that doesn't distance the study and decoloniality from our humane side and our generation, because, yes, we're taught it within the curriculum, but we felt it's really important to have a student-led body doing this, especially [I think acknowledging] it in the form of memes or relevant pop culture because that in itself is also a valid way to express these ideas.

Kyra: I actually had a specific question for Alex. So, your research interests are kind of… looking at the role of colonial garments in identity construction. Would that be identities of consumers or of brands themselves? Because I feel like, in some…like I feel like it could like work in both ways, you know?

Alex: Yeah, completely. So, actually, when I…when I emailed you about what my research interests were, I was kind of just starting my MA, and I really kind of didn't know how to answer the question so went with something very broad [laughing]. Something that I think about…something that I think about a lot that I definitely credit to CSM is that, at the very, very beginning of any research project I do, I'm always thinking about the agency – who am I giving agency to? Who already has the agency in this situation? Who doesn't have it? Who needs to have it? And I think that that is a question that is really helpful to approach any research project with. So, with this particular project, when I'm looking at identity, I think really my answer to that question, relative to whatever research project it is, is: who…whose identity do we know enough about already and whose identity don't we, and whose identity can we, through historical research, uncover? Something that I'm looking at the moment is the Manila shawl, which is absolutely beautiful garment that I'm sure a lot of you will have seen – they're reproduced absolutely everywhere. But, historically, they're fascinating. They were produced in China, they were traded through the Philippines, became a very, very popular garment in colonial Mexico, and then they went over to Spain, they were found in Parsi communities – they were completely global in their reach, and what I find so fascinating is that this object remains the same, except the identity of the object itself is

completely transformed relative to whatever society it's in. And so, when I'm looking at the shawl, I'm thinking, okay, yeah, the shawl was really widely worn in Britain and America during the 20th Century. We know that story. That's completely…its construction of identity in like American film in the 1920s is so well produced. It features in 'The Great Gatsby' for goodness sake – we've all seen it. But, actually, that shawl was also really, really popular in 19th Century colonial Mexico. It was really popular amongst Parsi communities in the early 19th Century. Those histories, those agencies, those identities are the ones that we don't know about, and I think that that's the power of fashion research, that we can uncover those.

Sahara: If I could add to that, is that okay? So, I feel like Alex and I have very similar interests because what I did for my MA dissertation was focusing on photography of Romani women, and I noticed that a lot of fashion cultures have sort of taken or blended with Romani culture all over the world, but yet the Romanies don't really get any credit, and also they are such an interesting case study because they fall out of typical notions of time, space, political belonging, and so, yeah, it's definitely about like who is being overlooked and… There's such a systematic overlooking of nomadic fashion cultures. And then, on top of that, I wanted to look at gender and also the depictions in how [women] are seen and their dress, their aesthetised bodies are seen as…sort of markers of culture and so symbolic, and I definitely agree with her about the power of fashion research. You can learn so much about the world in general, and people so often just dismiss fashion, which is quite a shame really.

Kyra: So, I guess, thinking about the Society again, how do you feel it has kind of impacted others at your institution, whether that's students or maybe lecturers and like other kinds of educators?

Sahara: I would say that we've not been running for very long but we wanted to make something, at least in the limited time we had, so it's more like we've like planted the seed. We're getting people to think about this, and Melody, you know, said I think earlier on that she just wanted it to exist, so, you know, it's a small seed and then we're making friendships and it's…you know, small but significant because like, you know, baby steps is how you get to the larger impacts.

Kyra: No, for sure, and I think that's actually one of the things that I love so much about like the Decolonising Fashion Society, how you've made it so accessible to people, like especially like in the student kind of community, and how you really try to kind of like bridge the gap between talking about having these conversations and then making them something that, you know, we can talk about in our kind of like language, I guess.

Sahara: We had so much fun with the meme.

Kyra: I can imagine!

Sahara: I also remember, at the welcome fair that we did at the beginning…I think of September, like numerous students, they literally like beelined, almost ran, towards our stall because they were just like so happy that it existed, and so, yeah, what Melody was saying about how other students know that there are people thinking about this, and willing to engage with it, it's so important.

Kyra: Yeah. I'm just making a mental note because I'm going to have to start incorporating memes into our social media [laughing]! So, obviously, you guys are a multidisciplinary group, as we are in the Pedagogies for Social Justice. What have some of the pros been for you guys, coming from different walks of life and different subject areas, and have there been any particular challenges with that?

Melody: In terms of the pros then, because we discussed this, yeah, in pros, we definitely learn a lot from each other and there's a lot of like cross-pollinisation of our ideas, and I think that only enriches our understanding of what decolonising fashion means, and it reinforces the idea that fashion and the patriarchy touches every single person in such an individual way. And, again, really, yeah, we want to be as intersectional as we can be, so it's super-important that we are very multidisciplinary within the group.

Sahara: I love that, the cross-interdisciplinary pollination, amazing, love that! I think it's not really con per se but it's just a little bit difficult sometimes having to explain what we are and who we are and what we do, and, as Melody mentioned earlier, there's this whole difficulty with whether we even wanted to name it Decolonising Fashion. So, there's different departments, and different individuals have different sort of degrees of what you might call decolonial consciousness. Essentially, we just try and say, look, we're trying to make fashion more inclusive – that's like gender, class, race, ethnicity wise, in all respects. And then, also, we just have to really articulate and try and…market…or "market" is maybe not the best word [laughing], but make it…make people from different departments aware that they can be a part of Decolonising Fashion. It is not only for Fashion because obviously everyone on the planet, unless you live in like an isolated place by yourself, engages with fashion in some way, shape or form, and so everyone can be a part of it, and we have to make sure to articulate that.

Kyra: Yeah. Thank you. And what is next for the Decolonising Fashion Society, and, I guess, how can we keep up-to-date and engage with you guys further?

Sahara: I would say it's whatever the future students want to make of it because we're going to be leaving soon, but it's really exciting to see what's going to come.

Melody: In terms of keeping up with us, you can definitely follow us on Instagram, @decolonising_fashion – that's decolonising with an "s", the British spelling of decolonising. Yeah, so keep up with us on Instagram, and if you are joining UAL, you can sign up on the SU page for free, so you can, yeah, sign up for free membership, and, yeah, definitely, follow… watch this space!

Kyra: Amazing. I'm going to put the link to the Instagram in the description anyway so it's there for everyone to check out. So, just for this last segment, I guess linking back to decolonisation in relation to Fashion curricula, what colonial assumptions are still deeply embedded in Fashion pedagogies? And I guess, when I say pedagogies, I'm really referring to kind of how fashion is taught in the classroom or in like workshops, lecture theatres, the way you're assessed, and I guess the relationships that you have in educational spaces as well like to your lecturers and other kind of members of stuff, so really I guess along those lines…

Sahara: I definitely have something that I feel very strongly about. So, there's often [an assertion], not just in Fashion but in a lot of academic spaces, that non-North American and European societies are ahistorical, so they just…they're not capable of dynamism, innovation and change. And, obviously, to be capable of change is…it means so much. It means that you can evolve and improve and be…and also just this idea that non-North American and European studies aren't pluralistic, they're just sort of homogenous. And you know how people, for example, think that Africa is a country, which is obviously preposterous, and that really affects Fashion Studies as well, you know, so to think…then you see that…it's called "dress" or "costume" and not "fashion" and it's not seen as capable of change and innovation, which is so sad really because you leave out so much, and obviously, the idea that you can sort of dress ethnically and that doesn't mean that it's historical or backward and that, you know, that can be modern too – you can have blends of styles. It's very deeply rooted, yeah, this notion of ahistoricalness. So, to think…to rethink fashion is also to rethink like political belonging and time and space, so you really have to rethink sort of things that you would see and consider as everyday are not things that you should take for granted per se, if that makes sense.

Kyra: I actually wanted to ask you, Sahara, because I know, yeah, like you said, you're very interested in kind of like developing new understandings of fashion that aren't reliant on fixed perceptions of space and time: do you mean how we understand fashion and its ties to kind of specific cultures, histories and like moments in time? Like I'm really interested to kind of hear your thoughts on that a bit more…

Sahara: Yeah, so I can elaborate. I'm also learning myself and still sort of developing this new way of thinking myself, so forgive me if I'm unclear in any points. So, for example, I noticed in a lot of history books, or fashion history books, that we talk about fashion in terms of nation states, and those are very new concepts, like maybe, what, 200 years old, maybe a bit older in some cases, but a lot of like nations that we know today are barely even a century old and yet we'll still be like, oh, the history of Indian fashion….but like what is India? India used to be…also include Pakistan and Bangladesh and then…and there's all these different empires and kingdoms that made up what we know as modern India, and yet we say that's Indian historical fashion, but then you're talking about the 1400s – India did not exist, right? And then also just this idea that certain garments are something that you wear…in the past or when you're mimicking the past or when you're sharing an ode to the past, but, actually, the way in which you wear them, even though they are sort of meant to emulate tradition and historicalness, the way they're worn, the way they're expressed in the modern context is actually a very modern phenomenon, if that makes sense. So, yeah, it's just to really understand that a lot of the ways in which we view the world are very fixed, and since fashion is a way…expressions of how we view the world and how we interact with the world, that's why you sort of have to rethink both at the same time, if that makes sense again… I'm also learning…

Kyra: No, it makes complete sense. And I guess you see that when there's kind of debates about where certain patterns or like a certain garment or like a trend, where it originates from – I guess that's probably like a way to kind of articulate it, yeah. No, it makes total sense – thank you. And, obviously, Sahara and Carmen, you're both studying, or you've just graduated from, should I say, a Master's in Fashion Critical Studies. So, apart from like content, do you think there are any other like major differences between like the methods of teaching using your course compared to, say, if you were studying an MA in just purely Fashion Studies?

Carmen: I think…I wouldn't say…I think it was still quite traditional, in the sense that we had like lectures and then we had essays to submit, but I do think like…still there were some like more ways… For example, we did a lot of like essays [or exercises] on objects that, for example, me studying Art History. I hadn't ever experienced. And you think it's quite crazy, right, because you're actually working with, em, I don't want to say a project but like something material, you know. So, in that sense, that was very interesting I think. They

wanted to keep it more practical and also creative, and also, what Sahara was even saying before about "dress" and "costume", like if we would bring objects from our own house or from our family members or whatever, they will be things that maybe you don't think that… it's not that you don't think they are valuable, but you don't think they are valuable in a classroom, in an institution, in a university, so that was very interesting in their approach. And I also think like our lecturers were quite interesting, like…I mean, obviously, there was some of them like…you know, like [everywhere]…like [whom I might not have liked] as much, but, for example, I would remember one related to [drugs, animal drugs], that really flipped me out, em…even like [a lot of] terms of sexuality, em, fashion and capitalism that was like taught by [Tambir Ahmed], she's a brilliant teacher at CSM. So, I think that, in that sense, it was more dynamic, and I also would say that, in terms of being Fashion Critical Studies, it was also practical, a little bit at least. So, yeah, I think that encouraged the way…because I think like, also, you want to…teach…in a decolonial way, like not…you cannot also be as traditional, like as Western education has been, you know. So, I think that that encouragement and that willingness was there.

Sahara: Yeah, I would agree. I do think, in particular, yeah, I was very struck at the mention of sexuality and sex in fashion was covered. I really enjoyed that. And there were times where like, you know, professors were kind of giggling, but they still…they still spoke about it, and I think that's really important because a lot of the…there's an increasing awareness of…well, maybe we take it for granted within the institution of CSM but hopefully there's more an increasing awareness of talking about race, but, weirdly, we still have such a deeply engrained like shame when it comes to talking about sex, and discussing sex in fashion, that was really interesting. And also the idea that, in Fashion Critical Studies, you're allowed to have a paper where there isn't necessarily a super-straightforward argument. Like, obviously, you have to be clear, but at the end of the paper, you can say: this is an ambiguous subject and this is a difficult thing to tackle, hence it is being tackled in this academic paper, if that makes sense… And, also, positionality was very emphasised, which I really appreciated because it really… We had a whole session, multiple sessions on it, actually, and it really helped in our research approaches.

Kyra: So, I guess, on that note, like what else do you guys think lecturers can do to kind of begin to like actively decolonise their pedagogy or like teach decolonial content?

Melody: I think I can say, for me, I think, especially with decolonial pedagogies, you should practise what you preach. So, yes, think about the way that information is shared and who takes up space within these conversations, and just hire more lecturers of colour and marginalised people, like period.

Alex: I feel like so negative when this conversation comes up, but I feel so strongly that like, obviously, of course, you can teach decolonial content and that's great and that is so helpful and so constructive, but it's so important to talk about, in this conversation, that the university will never, ever be a decolonial space.

Melody: Agreed.

Alex: It cannot be. To say you're going to decolonise a university is like…it's impossible. That cannot be done. And I think that…that, as a fact, has to underlie conversations about incorporating decolonial pedagogies into…into higher education institutions. These institutions are colonial institutions. And that's a fact. But, that being said, steps towards incorporating decoloniality into university curriculums is essential, and it's really important to have those conversations about how, although it will never be fully decolonial, how at least decoloniality can…can be incorporated and can take up space. And I think it's also worth remembering that higher education and university institutions and university lecturers are not the only people that can incorporate decolonial pedagogy into their teaching. You know, there are so many spaces of learning that are not the university. The university is such an exclusive space, particularly when we're talking about CSM - you know, it's hard to get into, it requires a lot of money, and there is so much privilege behind being at an institution like that. In some ways, you know, pedagogies outside of university institutions are much more able to be decolonial in their thinking, so I think that it's really worth looking beyond the university at this point into other spaces of learning.

Carmen: Yeah, I would add as well that I think it's very important because…not only what Melody said that I think is like basically the most essential thing, and also what Alex was saying – I also think it's important…like I see…I have seen, all my life, like teachers, academics, researchers, like always keeping up-to-date on their field. I think it's also important, like even if you feel like having a decolonial perspective doesn't go with you, it actually goes with you, you know? Like I'm even thinking like my Art History, like, I don't know, the…my…my Picasso teacher [in] university too, like, yeah, it goes with you as well. The way…the same way you update your [research ?], it's important that you update to the times that we're living in, and these new…studies and new perspectives, like it's not fair that you continue to teach the same way you taught like 30 years ago. I think it's just unfair, and I think like sometimes they even see it as something of a more younger generation or something like that, and it's not. So, I think there should be also an effort like from these teachers that…even though…like maybe, in five years, you are not going to teach again, those last five years, it's important that you keep up-to-date because you owe it…not only to yourself, in a way, you owe it to your students, to the institution you're working in, and, in general, to your field and, yeah, I don't know, to the world as well.

Kyra: Thank you. So, I guess, what advice would you guys give to future students who are thinking of pursuing a Fashion-related degree at CSM?

Alex: Get comfortable with being uncomfortable… CSM is going to force you to be uncomfortable, and that is an amazing thing, and, you know, enjoy that, embrace that, please, please, please! If you're lucky enough to have an opportunity to get a degree at CSM, please walk in ready to be uncomfortable. I think, that also being said, I'm sure that… there might be people listening to this that are not pursing a degree at CSM – you know, most people aren't [laughing]. Maybe…maybe if you're pursuing a degree at another university, but you're engaged with issues like this, I think that it's really important to…you'll realise very quickly when you reach…when you reach a typically academic institution, if you like - I definitely did when I first started at Warwick - that these are not issues that are on most people's radars. They're absolutely not, and don't expect them to be, because these conversations are not widely happening. And I think I would say, particularly if you're a white student going into an academic space that's…that's obviously not CSM, I think that you really have to walk into that space and realise that you have an immense amount of privilege, being a white student in that space, and you must, must, must use it. I really can't enforce that enough. Like it is still an unfortunate reality that, as a white student, your voice will be heard more than other voices, so you have to use that to amplify those other voices. You have to stick your neck on the line. You have to be uncomfortable. Because, if you see something that you can do, and you can use your privilege, as a white student, to stick your neck on the line and say, okay, this is wrong, you have to take up…you have to grab that by the balls, sorry, to say [laughing] that you do, you know, use that, because these institutions will not change unless students walk into them and make them change. And if you're a white student walking into that, frankly, the consequences that you will face by sticking your neck on the line are not the consequences that will be faced by a student of colour sticking their neck on the line in the same way, and, as a white student, you have a responsibility to, you know, to make the changes that we all need to be…we all need to see made.

Yiling: Exactly. And it's the small conversations that you have every day with the people that you meet at university that can teach you just as much about decolonial thinking as the curriculum can, if not more, and so, easier said than done, but we need to be the initiator of these conversations and to go with open ears because our opinions about fashion will change, our relationship with fashion will change, and we can make our experiences in [this world our own]. This is my biggest advice for anyone who is going into higher level education. Despite what we know about success, [if you] want to be a big picture thinker, it's possible - you do not have to listen to what you're told success is. You can make your own experience as you go.

Kyra: So, unfortunately, that actually brings us to the end of our talk. I don't want to keep you guys any longer, I know you guys…some of you have a party to go to, 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?

Melody: I would just say, quickly, our call to action for our Society would be really, to anyone listening who has the power, really help to fund and support initiatives like us, like especially student-led initiatives and societies, because…yeah, it was actually even raised by an academic at our university that we shouldn't have had to set up a society like ours, but I think the approach should be, mm, asking, "How can we help you guys, how can we support?" and I do have to say, like we were really…we felt it was really difficult to do a lot of things because of the funding, and we had a very limited budget. We tried as much as we could, and we even, you know, like used our own budgets and own money to fund some certain things. So, yeah, I would say the funding would really help to actually push this work forward, and especially, yeah, grassroots groups like us.

Yiling: Exactly. Funding, funding, funding, government support, and lowering the tuition for students, for international students, to hopefully bring a little bit more balance into who has the opportunity to get the privilege of a higher level of education in a Western country, not only reliant on students to fund the universities. So, government support, acknowledging the cultural importance of sustaining not only [this] university, if they do this, but of this whole country [and of our globalising selves] so… Big wishes [laughing]!

Kyra: Well, Alex, Melody, Carmen, Sahara, and Yiling, I cannot express like how grateful I am that you guys joined me today on the podcast, like I'm looking forward to seeing what is next for each of you, and the Decolonising Fashion Society, and I hope we can find more ways to collaborate because I just think the work that you guys are doing is just so special and inspiring to us at the PSJ, so thank you for just giving us this opportunity to share that with our audience.

[Talking over one another – thanks]

Alex: Thank you for holding these conversations – it's so important.

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