# Episode #04 Reflections with Constance and Darian

Language of Conversation: English

Begin of Recording.

**Darian:** Good morning, Constance and happy Nowruz.

**Constance:** The same to you and good morning, Darien. Good morning, everyone. Today we have a bit of a special episode because we do not have a guest. It is just you and I, and yeah, why are we doing just the two of us?

**Darian:** Yeah, I guess, I mean we've done what, four episodes now? And, well, in the pilot it was also sort of just the, the two of us talking. But since then we've had three different guests on, and I guess there've been a number of things that we have kind of, I dunno if we've felt uncomfortable about, there have been like, you know, we call them sort of pain points, but some things that we felt like we needed to talk about more just the two of us, uh, and try to flesh out a little bit more also for our, for our own understanding.

**Constance:** Right. And I think, one that is a bit of a red threat throughout all the episodes, but one that became maybe particularly visible in our last episode, which was called “Is the University to Left?” is the feeling of disempowerment amongst the people at the university that call themselves progressives. So one thing that happened in the aftermath of the last episode is that we received an email saying “shouldn't the episode be rather called is the university to right?” And if we take “right” in the classic political sense, as economically conservative or socially conservative. I think our guests of the last episode had a point that we do not see that largely in our university or in other western universities this kind of right-wingism, or conservatism. But at the same time, this feeling apparently still exists of people saying, well, we perceive the university as being too right? So, the question is what what is actually meant by this? Is it that we also see that quite often in ourselves and maybe also in people that we talk to that used to consider themselves left, that now say, well, nowadays I'd rather call myself conservative in the light of whatever else is happening on the left, and I feel alienated from that or disconnected from that. So, I think one of the questions is what then is left in the university context and who are the real progressives?

**Darian:** Yeah, so I think in terms of the question about whether or not the university is left or right, so we can I guess start off by saying, and I think that our guest in our previous episode, Andreas de Block that was part of the point that he wanted to make that as far as there is a conservative intellectual movement or conservative intellectual strain of thinking, it's no longer prevalent or maybe even hardly present within Western universities. And I think that's probably something that we can agree with. It just sort of leads us to the question of, well, what are we actually talking about when we are talking about something being left or something being right, or something being progressive or something, being non progressive. And I think Andreas gave us a pretty clear idea of what he meant by conservative or what he meant he didn't use the term “right-wing” I think he used the term “conservative”. And it had to do with identifying a certain group of values around which yeah, thinking is oriented and also, which orient scientific research.

Now, on the other hand, I think we could ask, right, is the university too liberal and then that's a slightly different question, and then it leads us to the question of what do we mean by “liberal”? And if we mean by that, okay, liberal means again, a certain commitment to a certain set of values that we would identify as social liberal values, so things like fairness, some notion of equality, some liberal notions of justice. And maybe together with that, again, some commitment to liberal economic values, right? So, to the importance of the free market, to the centrality of private property in terms of the way we think about economic relations, but also political relations. Well, then I think we would've less trouble in saying, yeah, Western universities or the university academia as a, as a whole not just in, you know, specific departments, but academia as a whole shows a kind of commitment to these kind of liberal social values, but also liberal economic values. And this creates quite a bit of tension, but not always the same types of tension and not always with the same groups.

**Constance:** Right. So, when we take the social liberal values, I do think that, most people who would consider themselves socially liberal or progressive would adhere to certain ideas of progressivism as fighting against oppression or fighting for the oppressed, giving attention to marginalized groups, redistribution of wealth.

**Darian:** Yeah, to a certain extent. I guess again, it has to do with, you know, the putting together of these different terms. So, we bring together now this kind of, this idea of social liberalism with a kind of progressivism, and I guess the notion of progressivism is simply that you know, things, things can and do get better. Things can get better if we take certain actions and if we talk about liberal progressivism, it would be, you know, things can get better. We can improve our social situation, our social and political situation towards -

**Constance:** From within.

**Darian:** From within, what do you mean by “from within”?

**Constance:** From within. The current structures in which we are.

**Darian:** Yeah. Right. From within the current structures that we, that we sit in without a complete overhauling or complete overthrow of, of those structures and we can do that in, and I, and I think again, now we bring in this other term, right? We can do that in ways that are more or less what we would call “technocratic”, right?

So we identify a problem using something that resembles, you know, or something that we agree resembles something like the scientific method. So, on the basis of evidence and then we identify ways of addressing that problem. Again, in a way that we say is evidence-based or evidence-driven. And as you put it very often, the ways that we would address those kind of problems or problems relating to inequity or problems relating to fairness has something to do with a redistribution of various forms of resources, right? But again, it's a kind of tinkering that we're talking with, it's not an overhaul or overthrow of an entire, let's say system of social, economic, or political organization even at, even at the level of one institution like a university.

**Constance:** Right. So, I think when we have many voices, or maybe we have voices that come to the university and that can be on a central level, that can be on a program level, on a decentral level, doesn't really matter, who will say, okay, we have to do something about this injustice. And that can be the way we teach Dutch history, that can be who has access to the academic jobs that we offer or that can be all kinds of different things. And the technocratic machinery goes into, into action mode and thinks of ways within the limits of the system to remedy this problem or this challenge, right? And from, from what I can tell is that, and the people who are working within the system do it out of, mostly out of a social liberal conviction also, right? So that is the basis of that ‘we wanna make it better, we believe that we can actually achieve progress within this system and we will, as good technocrats as we are, think of solutions within the system that will address that problem’.

I do think by the people who bring the problem there, the criticism is, well, your solution doesn't actually address the problem. That can be because you don't understand the problem fully. You didn't listen to the people who actually experienced the problem, or you're not willing to push the boundaries far enough to do something that will actually change.

**Darian:** Yeah. I mean, I think those three things are pretty linked up to one another, right? So if you, if, if a group of people brings forward, a claim about a certain type of injustice, and that can be, you know, we can talk about that in all sorts of different ways, whether it's the way we teach, whether it's who we teach, whether it's the way we hire, career policy, whatever it might be within the institution. And says, well, this is reflective, this problem is reflective of a structural issue of a structural claim, of a structural inequality of, of a systemic one. And then the response from within the institution is to say, ah no problem, we understand your claim, we recognize your claim, and we are going to address it within the constraints and within the boundaries of the existing infrastructure of the existing system. But if your claim is that there is a systemic problem, yeah, then it's very difficult to understand or how that might be addressed within the constraints of that system. I, I think in many cases the dilemma looks something like that and we end up in this kind of almost intractable situation where there is a kind of hope on the side of the institution that problems and I, I think it's a genuine hope. I don't think it's in bad faith either I think, that problems can be addressed through a kind of incrementalism, through a kind of policy procedure where we study problems, we study possible solutions to those problems, and then we implement those solutions to those problems without turning the whole thing on its head. And I think if you think the whole thing really needs to just be turned on its head, that's a much different scenario.

**Constance:** Yeah.

**Darian**: Now I, I think if you really think the whole thing just needs to be turned on its head then telling the, you know, management structures of an institution. Look, this whole thing is rotten, it needs to be turned on its head. I, I don't think you can expect a real response or real results from that. So, I also think there is this question of, well, are we willing to accept the kind of incrementalism within the constraints of the system that we have? Or no, we really say the whole thing has to be turned on and said we have to throw everything out and start over again. But there, of course there are tradeoffs that come with that, and there, that's a big sacrifice that everybody makes. And of course, people hold onto their entrenched positions and their entrenched power.

**Constance:** Right. I also think that that plays a big role in it, right? Disrupting the status quo of a system that moves fairly smoothly, albeit slowly but smoothly, and moves seemingly in a direction that feels like progress. Why disrupt that? Right? It can be about individual positions in that, why would you disrupt your own positionality in it, but also why would you disrupt the system for something you don't know whether it's gonna be better? But at the same time, I can also see how incredibly frustrating it is to address a problem that for you? It's very visible in the structures, not in individual behaviors. No, in the structures of a system and how frustrating it is that the answers will always be based on the system, right? So the answer will not be able to penetrate that deeply into the structures you would want to. And that is partially because why would we want to do that? Partially because maybe we, we don't know how. Right? I see it also in my job. Of course, we know that systemic racism is a thing, but it's a highly abstract thing, right? To really pinpoint structures that leads to racial discrimination, and again, not in behavior, but really in access to certain functions or in the way we write our curricula. That is extremely difficult. So, you know, people stay maybe away from it, or we don't know how to do it, so that's why we stay away from it. But at the same time, I also see in my own job that the solutions that are then being offered in good faith I, I think so too. In, in majority of cases, it's in good faith, are performative solutions. They have, they feel like, we check that box, now we can move on. And we did our good deed with doing whatever, doing a training or writing a policy that is supposed to address that problem, whereas the problem continues to exist and here I can see that people write to us saying, shouldn't we call the university too right? Not in sense of to right-wing maybe, but in a sense of literally conservative, trying to conserve the system we have with some adaptations here and there, you know, in good faith. But actually, we are, we're conserving it.

**Darian:** Well, I, I think institutional structures tend towards maintaining themselves, right? Bureaucracies also tend towards maintaining themselves and it's very, very difficult from within a bureaucracy, within an institutional bureaucracy, I don't use bureaucracy in some sort of negative way. It's just we, this is a, we all institutions have, have bureaucracy and bureaucracy as good sides and bad sides to it, but it's very difficult to question the structure of the, or even to question the underlying assumptions, the underlying economic, social, political presuppositions upon which a bureaucratic structure is built. It's very difficult to question those from within the structure. On the other hand, we say, well, it's very difficult to make change from without, right? So, if you're, if you're not within the structure, how do you expect to make any change to the structure? Yeah, and I, I think this is a sort of classical conundrum of social change, of political movements, right? Either you're on the inside and you get co-opted, or you're all, you know, you're automatically co-opted by participating within the institutional structures, within the bureaucratic structures or you're on the outside trying to bang on the door, but not really able to make efficient change to the workings of the machine.

**Constance:** So, let's talk about the people who bang on the door. Often what, what I hear or what we, we also hear back, and what I see is that people who bang on the door, who want to talk about structural issues, who want to talk about actually addressing historical wrongs, you know, progress are not being let in and they feel it's an undemocratic system in which they do not get a voice. Maybe because their voice doesn't fit to the existing structures that are there, you know, and uhm -

**Darian:** But no one said that bureaucracies were supposed to be democratic, did they?

Constance: I mean, that’s what we would like to think.

**Darian:** Why, why do we assume that this institution or any institution has to function in a democratic way or should, I mean, we could make a case that it should function in a more democratic way, but we shouldn't assume from the outset that it does function in a democratic way. We shouldn't in assume that power is somehow exercised democratically within an institution like this. I mean, there are certain democratic mechanisms -

Constance: Right.

Darian: There are checks and balances. Certainly that's the case. I, I don't deny that in the least, but I, I wouldn't say either that it's a democratic institution.

**Constance:** No. But then there's a question. We do try to be one, right? We have councils, faculty councils, university councils in programs. We have program committees where we invite staff members and students to together work on evaluating a program, you know, making strategy for the future of the program.

**Darian:** But there is a difference between having consultative bodies. There is a difference between having consultation processes. There's a difference between having, processes of consensus building and real democracy. The two are the two or the three or whatever, however many things I just mentioned are not all the same thing, right? And I think a real radical democracy where power is not concentrated within the hands of a few or within the hands of a managerial elite, well, that's something very different.

**Constance:** Is it something that we want to achieve, that would help?

**Darian:** I don’t know. I mean, I think we, the knee jerk, my knee jerk reaction is to say, yes, of course we should be more democratic.

**Constance:** Yes, I know that it's the first reaction. But when you think it through?

**Darian:** Yeah, but we, but thinking it through, thinking about how it is that we would actually run an institution in that manner, is another question I think, and it's a, is a more difficult one. We may certainly say that, yeah, there are democratic bodies, there are democratic mechanisms, and those should have more power, should have more influence, should have more right of consent, not just right of advice and, and this type of thing and we should examine the ways in which people are appointed to these democratic bodies, the ways in which our elections happen, et cetera, et cetera. That's certainly a way of thinking about it. But that again, that's kind of thinking it from the inside, right?

**Constance:** And I just wanted to say, because the problem goes deeper, right? Even if these bodies had a power of veto or a power of consent, then what we still see is that certain voices, even if they are in these bodies, don't get the same attention or don't have the same credibility within the bodies, and they're being made into irrational and unscientific voices. And now we come to the point, I think, the pain point within the university if we accept the fact that the university is not right-wing in the classic political sense, but that they are, if you want intra-ideological struggles within a group that mostly considers themselves socially liberal or progressive. Then, we now are faced with a group, and you know, I don't know, I don't want to call it the “woke group”, but it's, it's a certain group of people within the university that demand attention for social injustice problems. And they feel that they don't have the same access to the conversations, and they are made into irrationals or unscientific members of the community. So is that, is that a gatekeeping of the democratic structures, and I'm hyphenating here, democratic structures that we have, there is a sort of gate keeper that makes sure we stay within the system.

**Darian:** I'm just speculating, but I think certainly there is probably a kind of gatekeeping that is always, always at work. I think also there is a question of what forms of expression, what forms of evidence we consider to be legitimate for decision making or legitimate bases for decision making within certain types of bodies or certain types of institutions. And it's of course the case that it's a, you know, very sort of well-known method of excluding groups or individuals from decision making processes or from let's say the seats of power by simply saying, what you're saying doesn't make sense, it's irrational, it's hysterical, you're not following proper procedure. You know, you need to fill out this form. You need to make a, you know, make a list, make a party, you need to do X, Y, or Z before you can really have voice within this institution. And yeah, those mechanisms are there. We might say those mechanisms are there to ensure the proper functioning of the institution and to ensure checks and balances, et cetera, et cetera. But those mechanisms historically have always served also as methods of exclusion as well.

**Constance:** Of ideological gatekeeping.

**Darian:** Yeah, you could call it ideological gatekeeping or some, yeah, some political gatekeeping, epistemological gatekeeping ... some kind of gatekeeping, right?

**Constance:** Yes. I do think that this is something that we can, by this kind of gatekeeping and whether it really happens or not, but it's, it's definitely in the experiences of people that we talk to and also, and sometimes in my own experiences, I don't know whether in your experiences, but it gives a feeling of, disempowerment, right? It gives a feeling of I would like to be part of the conversation. This is an important conversation. We need to be having it. At a university we should be having it, but I, I feel not being allowed or not being invited to the table to have the conversation.

**Darian:** I think that there, I mean, let me play devil's advocate for a moment, right? So, I can say, okay, well, who's stopping you from coming to the table? There are ample opportunities for that. We have ample mechanisms for that.

**Constance:** Okay.

**Darian:** Who's, I mean, why can't you just try to phrase your claims? Why can't you try to express yourself in a way that is understandable to the institution that makes sense within the, those epistemic structures of the institution, of political structures, of the institution, and that the institution can then respond to an appropriate way?

**Constance:** Yes.

**Darian:** Why, why are you being so difficult? Look, there are student councils, there are faculty councils, there are, there's a university council. These are all bodies in which students or anybody within the university community can try to get themselves elected to and make then their positions, right? You know, what's the problem?

**Constance:** You know, there's this famous saying in diversity work, you know, this classic saying of “diversity is being invited to party and inclusion is being invited to dance and justice is being invited to pick the music”, right? And this is, I mean, I know it's a cheesy, it's cheesy, but in the end, then it boils down to, right, of course there are the structures that invite people to the party, you know, and there are also structures that make people feel heard, right? You are allowed to dance, but are you allowed to pick the music if your suggestions are too disruptive to the system? If they're perceived as too difficult to address by the policy mechanisms we have at hand?

**Darian:** Yeah, no, obviously. I mean, I, I think for me, the obvious bureaucratic answer is no, right? No, you're not allowed to just pick any you want in this, at this party.

**Constance**: Yeah, you have to pick from our list.

**Darian**: This is, you have to pick from our, this is a certain kind of party, right? So, we have a, you have a certain list of whatever, let's not go too far with this metaphor. But yeah, I, I mean, I think, to be honest, probably that's, that's the case. Because if we change the music completely, the, the party doesn't work anymore.

**Constance:** No, exactly. And that's the point. There's a reason why we have a list, right?

**Darian:** Yeah,

**Constance:** There is a reason why we have a framework. But at the same time this framework keeps us from addressing problems.

**Darian:** I, think we're talking about music now, right? And so, one of my favorite songs is, of course, Nina Simone's Go Slow, right? And it's this terribly, it's this, wonderful, wonderful, angry, angry litany of all of the injustices that are visited upon a certain community, in this case, African Americans. And the response from well-meaning liberals saying “go slow, go slow, go slow”.

**Constance**: Right.

**Darian**: And you find this, I mean, you find this repeated, I think I was listening to a wonderful thing by James Baldwin also saying, you know, look, my grandfather had to deal with it, my father and mother had to deal with it, and now you want me to deal with it? How slow can we go? This is ridiculous, right? That's the point that Nina Simone makes. That's the point that Baldwin makes.

**Constance**: Yeah.

**Darian**: That's the point, even maybe that Martin Luther King makes when he says, you know, the real enemy of our movement is the white liberal progressive arguing for incremental, slow, change that stays within the boundaries of already defined processes. Yeah, I think that that's the argument, right?

**Constance:** Yeah, it's something that is very recognizable I think, in that I often hear “history will tell”, you know, this will be the right away, we designed our system. This pain point will go. You need have faith in the system. And I think that's really something that -

**Darian:** Yeah, I think many people quite reasonably suspect that, of being utter and complete bullshit.

**Constance**: Yeah.

**Darian**: You know, I, I said at the very beginning of our recording, “Happy Nowruz”, so it's Iranian New Year, Persian New Year. It's also the 20 year anniversary of the beginning of the Iraq war, right? Which I think now most people would say was a colossal mistake that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of innocent people and there has been no rectification. There has been no institutional reckoning, right? The people that are responsible for this war are now, you know, still hold their positions of influence, still hold their positions of power, you know, we see Michelle Obama snuggling up to George Bush and I really think it puts paid to the lie that things will work out in the end. It puts paid to the lie that, that there will be a reckoning.

**Constance:** Yeah. I think that you have to learn how to play the game, right? And baby steps are everything you can hope for, right? I don't know whether, I'm ready to accept that, right? Because I've been the one saying myself, it will be all right. Let's have faith in the system. You know? And every time when I say this, I also think there's the shutter and I think, oh, should I, should I be saying this? Is that really the best we can hope for?

**Darian:** Yeah. I, I, I, think this was a point that got discussed a little bit in the last podcast, right? When Andreas was saying, look, in the long trajectory, the culture war, if we wanna talk about the culture war, will be won by liberals, right? That's a very liberal progressivist, almost wig position, right? And we maybe can use certain examples where we say, okay, we can look at the broad trajectory of thinking about specific issues. I, I think in that instance, we were talking primarily about issues around gender and sexuality and maybe that's the case, that it looks like that at this point, that look, things are slowly getting better, right? Of course it's not fast enough. Of course, there's still enormous injustice. But look where we are. If we think about where we are now vis-a-vis where we were 30, 40 years ago, it's a huge change in thinking. It's a huge change in policy, et cetera, et cetera. But for every example like that, there are other examples, I think where we say, no, actually it hasn't gotten better. You know? No, there hasn't been a reckoning for these war crimes. Quite, quite the opposite, right?

**Constance:** Yes. And there are always knew groups also that pop up, right? That haven't been dealt with historically in how people have treated these groups and you know, and what kind of, how their current social role is.

**Darian:** I think there is another issue as well, and it has to do with a clash of different forms of progressivism, right? And so right now we are talking about the clash that occurs between groups making certain kinds of justice claims, certain claims that either don't make sense within the context of a certain bureaucratic structure or are not, you know, can't be received within that structure. Don't have a clear policy response within that structure or where the response is, you know, go slow, incrementalism will get there eventually.

I think that's one issue, but the other issue is that there's a kind of clash that occurs, right? And we started off by talking about what we meant when we were using terms like “right”, “left”, “liberal”, and actually the point is we don't really understand what we mean when we use those terms. And I think one of the clashes that occurs and that occurs specifically in relation to the kind of topics that we're talking about now, is this sort of clash between traditional left-wing progressives, not even liberal progressives, although maybe to a certain extent. And this group that you refer to as the “woke”, or who are making kinds of claims that seem to be identitarian, that seems to be specific to certain groups, and that seem to not have the kind of essential characteristics of classic, what we would call left-wing progressivism. Not necessarily liberal progressivism, but left-wing progressivism. So, these notions of universalism, these notions, that class is the most important category. And I, and I think this represents another type of conflict within the institution, within the university.

**Constance:** Yes. You know, before, I said that often the, what’s it called, I don't even know, I don't wanna say the “woke group” the whole time, but like the, the new progressives maybe. I don't know. This kind of disempowerment or the, the lack of empowerment that this group feels, I do think the traditional left feels the same in the face of this newly emerging progressive left there. Because indeed there are values of universalism, redistribution of, of wealth and the importance of class is something that seems not to be as present or as recognized in the, the new form of progressive, of progressivism that we see. But even worse, I think that this group, from what we hear as when talking to people, feel alienated because they have the feeling they lost the claim on justice, right? The use of justice was so central or is so central to these efforts of the old left, if we want to call them like this, and now they cannot claim justice anymore because justice has in their feeling been hijacked, by this new progressive group under their terms and it's their way or the highway, right? There is no other way of approaching justice than their way, and if you try to do it in a different way, then you are right-wing immediately, basically, you know. That, that's a bit how it feels. So, people feel pushed into a sort of conservatism and I think this idea is the left cannot be woke or woke is not left, or it is. This, this feeling of disempowerment also from that group is quite visible. Also, within our own community.

**Darian:** Within our own community that seems quite prevalent and it also seems to push people who would have previously identified themselves with the left wing of the political spectrum into positions that would normally be characterized as conservative, right? Especially around cultural issues and, and perhaps especially around issues that call into question certain forms of tradition … around language, this type of thing. I think there is a sort of suspicion on the part of many who would have called themselves members of the, of the old left, right? So, let's say, you know, Social Democrats, Marxists, so those people. And I, I think we can really say those people who considered class to be the most important category when we are discussing questions of justice and when we are discussing questions of social and political change, right? So, I think there's a suspicion on the part of those people that this new type of claim, this new type of progressivism is not in fact working towards a sort of universal goal of liberation, a universal goal of, let's say a freedom conceived in economic or political terms even, but is actually working towards something that is much more identifiable from within a liberal perspective, which is just equal access to the market. And then the kind of claims that are made are about not having that equal access about certain groups being occluded or being shut out, and those are legitimate claims. I'm not saying those are not legitimate claims, right? But ultimately, I think the suspicion is that those are claims about access to the market, right? Access to a certain existing political system that is not being an economic system, that is not really being called into question. And I think that's where a lot of this tension seems to lie.

**Constance:** Right. I think there's this, you know, this famous saying in the new, politically correct language that you say, a person who is unhoused instead of saying homeless. And people from the more traditional left say, well, probably most people don't care how they're called, the only thing they want is a house, right? That is what should be the focus here, right? To make sure that we have housing for people, not how we call them. And it's made into an either-or question. Whereas language, we all agree I think, language does matter, right? How we talk about certain things, so we give meaning to that. How we essentialize certain things that matters in how we conceptualize these and what kind of meanings we attach to them. So, I wonder if it's an neither or question or whether this focus on access as you called it, but also on awareness of certain of groups of, the intricacies of these groups, of their experiences in our society. Does it have to be an either-or question, or is this kind of giving attention to their, if you want dignity to their visibility, something that can go hand in hand with addressing the underlying structural issues that have to do, especially with wealth or with class.

**Darian:** Yeah. So, I, I think your first point about, you know, whether we use the term homeless or unhoused or, or, I think the concern there is that the attention and the focus is put simply on what term we use, right? And not on specific, yeah, policy changes or political changes that would address the problem of unhousedness or, or homelessness. Now indeed, there might be good reasons to use a term like unhoused instead of a term like homeless, right? Someone might not have a, a physical home or a physical house to live in, but might have a place that they call home nonetheless. And actually, that could play a really important role in, in policy decisions, right?

Constance: Right, right. Yes.

**Darian**: For example rehousing people, right? Where do you rehouse people? Should you just say, well, you should be happy wherever you go, we're gonna send you somewhere else across the country. You'll get a roof over your head, so stop complaining. Said, no, I had a home in this other place even if I didn't have a house. So, there can be very good reasons for that, right? But at the same time, I think the suspicion and the concern, or the, the worry is that we are focused just on a type of language that we use and not on actual, actual change.

**Constance:** It's, I think it seems a bit of a cheap argument too, because now, now you can see it's so much focused on language policing and politically correctness it feels a bit like a, a cheap trick. All this focus on language policing or political correctness simply because, I mean, it is something that is uncomfortable, it is something that asks, maybe rethinking of, you know, of the language that we use, but it's a bit of a cheap trick to make it into this either-or thing, as you said, right? It can actually play a role in the policies that we come up with, whether that's policies on how we write history or how we make policies for people without a house. So yeah, I think it feels a bit like a fake divide. And I wonder where this need to create this divide is coming from. Because, at the same time, I'm also wondering whether the people who are so focused on language and on language use, I also have to say I don't see much there that actually addresses underlying problems to solve access or to solve, you know, the life in society by, for example, redistribution of wealth or other policy measures. So, I also don't see it so I can understand there's this, how did you call it? Suspicion? What’s the suspicion?

**Darian:** Concern? Suspicion? I, I think that's the, I mean, I was gonna say the opposite. I, I was gonna say, but you, you have much more direct experience. I was gonna say, I find it hard to believe that there are people who are really primarily concerned with what terms we use rather than with actual policies, or actions that influence people's lives in a material or real sense. Maybe that's the case.

**Constance:** I, think that's how it feels for at least many people that, that I talk to, especially, teachers. I think that's how it feels, right? There's so much concern for language use and such easy anger if the language use isn't respected, that people think, what, what are you actually doing? Right? Is it just about language? And I would say that for many people the answer is no. Language is, it's a means to an end, right? But if don't have the base, right, how can we actually address the underlying problems, right? If we don't understand the particularities of, of certain situations, or if we don't understand how language matters, if we don't take that seriously, how, how are we supposed to, to actually seriously think about the changes that need to happen?

**Darian:** Well, I, I, I, I'm not sure that's a good faith argument, right? So, I think that there are plenty of examples of people who have used the wrong language, used, you know, language that we would no longer consider to be politically correct, but still somehow despite this horrible conceptual misalignment, been able to work towards policy or be able to be activists. In ways that ried to bring about real positive change. Things that everyone would agree are are positive change.

**Constance:** So, who then are the real progressives, Darian?

**Darian:** I have no, I have no idea. I mean, every time we talk about this, I just become more and more confused. I think that one of the things that seems to me most worrisome or most upsetting is that there has been a very concerted and explicit effort on the side of people who label themselves as conservatives, I don't know whether they're actually conservatives or not, but we just say on the side of the political right in the United States, but also in Europe, to create schisms between groups, between individuals, between movements that should be aligned with one another. And I think one of the things that as within the university as a teacher, as a researcher, feels worrying is when one feels like they're no longer able to communicate, no longer able to find alignment with people who they feel they should be able to find alignment with, right? So, we say we're all concerned about justice, we, we may even be concerned about much more specific things than justice. You know, universal term of justice. We may all be concerned with racial injustice. We may all be concerned with structural racism, we may all be with, you know, the impact of colonialization on the curriculum down to very specific things, but we feel that we're no longer able to communicate on those matters. And we feel that, or some people may feel, I maybe revealed too much by saying, “we” actually, I don't really feel that way. But some people may feel that some kind of schism has emerged. And I think that the really dangerous thing is that political agents, political institutions, political movements that are not interested in addressing questions about inequality, addressing questions about structural racism, addressing questions about climate change, questions about, gender relations are able let's say to, to use that schism and to widen it somehow. And that seems to be more and more the case. And I think that is really, really concerning.

**Constance:** And you think we go too easily along in it? So, it's, it’s just external? Do we have no agency in that creating that schism ourselves? Ourselves being as progressives, as self-identified progressives.

**Darian:** Yeah, as self-identified progressives I think of course we have some, responsibility also in, in how we manage that, right? And how we, how we address that, and in oftentimes in letting ourselves be, be manipulated by it, right? So, oftentimes when I hear people on the left in the, especially in the sort of Anglo-American sphere, people on sort of old, well there's, you know, old school, traditional, left, concerned about class, concerned about demise of trade, unionism, these sort of things, right? Talk in these sort of disparaging tones about wokeness and that makes me really concerned actually, right? Because it's, it makes me think, well, we're not able then to build that bridge to those people that are concerned about these things that we label in in this way.

**Constance:** Yeah, but it's the same, it's the same mechanism the other way around, right? The people who think that they have a sort of monopoly on to decide what is justice and what is the actual problem and how does it need to be addressed. Who would then go on calling everyone else right-wing or conservative, whereas everyone else in an academic setting now is also interested, genuinely interested in addressing these kind of questions. So, we, yeah, we, we follow this schism, and everyone thinks their progressivism is, uh, the real deal, and the other one is either too immersed in a bureaucratic system to still see the light or too irrational and hysterical to see the light.

**Darian:** Yeah, I mean, I think this question of how you align to certain values and who you align with is a difficult one, and it's one that requires constant negotiation. We see maybe on both sides a sort of unwillingness to engage in that kind of negotiation, right? So, this really, you know, my-way-or-the-highway type of thinking about justice claims my-way-or-the-highway type of thinking about what radical democracy actually means. Which is a very strange way of approaching, these things, right? And I think that social movements have always entailed different forms of internal negotiation, and many times those forms of internal negotiation had themselves been victim to exclusion, discrimination, it goes on and on. Of course, there's a long history of that and it, and it's very well documented, right? But I think the concern is that we just throw out hope of negotiation at all with people that we should be aligned with.

**Constance:** See, that's why we do the podcast. Do we still have hope in negotiation?

**Darian:** I still have hope.

**Constance:** Me too.

**End of Recording.**