Episode #06 Decolonizing the Curriculum with Faisal Hamadah

**[Begin of recording; Language of conversation: English]**

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**[Introduction Music]**

**Darian:** Good morning, Constance.

**Constance:** Good morning, Darian, and welcome to our podcast Woke as Science. And today we're tackling one of the holy grails of wokeness: decolonization. So, everyone is talking about it, any policy document related to D&I has to have a chapter on decolonization or on decolonizing the curriculum or the university. They are decolonizing working groups in almost all of our faculties and also at other universities, of course. There are students and staff writing letters, calling for decolonizing the institution or the curriculum. As teachers, we have to do workshops on learning the skills on how to decolonize, but do we actually have any idea what we understand with the term? What would we mean with the term, what we are supposed to do when we are decolonizing? Well, I am not so sure I do know what that always looks like, especially when put into practice, do you?

**Darian:** No, not really. I don't know. I was gonna say that's a brave admission from you, but I guess I have some idea, yeah.

**Constance:** Yeah. There's some idea.

**Darian:** No, I have a very good idea.

**Constance**: Do you have a really good idea?

**Darian:** Well, we'll see how good my ideas are.

**Constance:** Well, to hopefully shed some light on these kind of questions, we invited Faisal Hamadah, marxist post-colonial scholar and a very dear colleague from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. So, thank you for joining us to discuss decolonizing.

**Faisal:** Thank you. My pleasure.

**Constance:** I already talked a lot about decolonizing, and I think before we go further into this, you should probably start with the definition of colonization before we go into the “de” or the “post” of it. So, how do you define colonization?

**Faisal:** It's a very simple definition. It's when a group of people who live in a specific territory have their land administered and exploited by a group of people from a distinct other territory. And that that goes on for a while. It would be as simple a definition as I can offer.

**Darian:** So that's a pretty simple definition. I mean, maybe it's helpful if we ask how does colonization in that instance, or in that way of defining it, differ from other processes or dynamics? So, I mean, how is colonization related to, for example, imperialism?

**Faisal:** I like to think of it this way as that imperialism is a much wider program in which distinct power ends up exerting itself over a vast swath of territory, which very often entails practices of colonization, although is not reducible to them. So, I would say that imperialism is kind of the larger category that sits above colonization, which is a practice usually associated with imperialism.

**Darian:** So, we can have processes of colonization or dynamics of colonization within processes of imperialism or within an imperial project?

**Faisal:** Yeah, absolutely. I think it would be very difficult to imagine a totally imperial project without a colonial dimension, although feasible, but very difficult to imagine a properly colonial and ongoing colonial practice without an imperial dimension behind it.

**Darian:** Yeah. Okay. That was the second part of my question. So, it is possible, we could, we could imagine, or we could think about colonial processes, colonial dynamics outside of the context of imperialism or you think that's difficult to, to imagine?

**Faisal:** I think in our, I think we need to historize these things always. And I think in the modern way in which we have seen both imperialism and colonialism function, I think it's very hard to see one without the other, totally. I do think that imperialism can continue without there necessarily being colonial practices.

**Darian:** And do you think colonialism always entails, let's say, direct administrative or coercive violent control of a population by another state or another population? Because we hear the word colonialism used in lots of different contexts, right? So, we talk about cultural colonialism, uh I was reading an article today about carbon colonialism. Are there other forms of colonialism besides this sort of very direct, how would we say, immediate form of control and coercion that you described in your sort of opening simple definition there?

**Faisal:** I think everybody is going to have something different to tell you about that one. And I think this is something we're going to see a lot over our discussion today is that these terms are all quite policiness on my end. I would say for those other things, let's come up with a different way of thinking about them, or a different way of talking about them because there are to this day settler colonial societies all around the world and I kind of want to retain that word to describe their practices for epistemological and even political and strategic reasons.

**Darian:** Okay, so you just used another term there, which I think it might be helpful to define. So started with the discussion about colonialism and sort of drawing some boundaries around the term colonialism. And now you just used the term settler colonialism. Can you just explain, does that mean the same thing or does that mean something slightly different?

**Faisal:** Yeah, so I think you can have a colonial enterprise as the British had in the Gulf where I'm from, for example, without a full-on settlement. You haven't completely displaced the people, although you are administrating them politically. This is how it was historically in the, in the Gulf States, in the Middle East. Settler colonialism literally entails the displacement of the indigenous or native population with the effort of taking their land. And I think we have many examples of that in the world today and so, I would rather reserve that word for them.

**Constance:** That word for them, instead of?

**Faisal:** Instead of using the word to describe other things which occur epistemologically, or culturally, et cetera, at this point. Although I will say that historically, people from Fanon onwards have found an important dimensions to discussing these things as colonialism, or at least as a subset or as an effect of actual colonialism, which is a relation of land. However, I think in today's world, I think we should kind of be a bit more careful of going in that direction.

**Darian:** Okay. So, I just want to go back for one second and clarify the distinction that you just made between I think one type of colonialism or one type of colonial project and what you called settler colonialism. So, on the one hand the example you gave was the British Colonial Project in the Gulf States, where there was a form of control, political administration, economic control, violent coercion, so on and so forth. But there wasn't a settler population that came and displaced the indigenous or the native population. And I guess the contrast to that would be colonial projects like in the Americas or in Australia. Am I getting that more or less right?

**Faisal:** I think that's, that's very well put.

**Constance:** So, I have the feeling you're going somewhere, when making this point, right? Because we were talking about decolonizing the curriculum and you said the broader definitions of colonization you would like to not use because you wanna reserve the weight that comes with the term for the actual colonized state of today.

**Faisal:** Mm-hmm.

**Constance:** So, what does that mean for the discourse that is going on in the university around colonization or decolonization?

**Faisal:** I think overall it comes from a good place and it comes from a relative dissatisfaction with how our societies overall are run and specifically in how our universities are run. I would like to see words like “diversify”. I don't know why that's become a bad word when it comes to this. It's like as if it wasn't radical enough to diversify …

**Constance**: Tell me about it …

**Faisal**: To diversify a curriculum that's, that's relatively radical, you know. We don't have to decolonize the curriculum, especially within the context of something like a university and this is one of my main problems with the way that that is framed is that the university is not separate from the rest of society. And discourses around decolonizing the university seem to take it as if the university was to a certain extent an autonomous space that you could directly change and somehow be reflective of the wider processes in which the university is embedded, right? And that would be kind of my response to that one. I think like diversifying the curriculum, democratizing the university, these are great words and I, I don't mind holding onto them.

**Constance:** Okay. Let's take a step back because I think they're actually quite some people who say diversifying is not radical enough indeed, because it overlooks, it makes it easier to overlook certain colonial practices, whether past or present that are ongoing in academic institutions. But let's take a step back and think even if, if you don't agree with the term, what do people mean in our context when they call for decolonization?

**Faisal:** What do you guys think it means?

**Darian:** Well, I was gonna ask another question actually. So, we, we just had a brief discussion of what colonization means, and so I was gonna ask about what the process of decolonization means, because, not necessarily within the university or within university curricula, but just more broadly as a political term. I mean, we talk about a decolonial period. We could talk about decolonial processes, we talk about anti-colonial revolutions that took place. So also, I mean, just so we can establish some clarity as to what we're talking about, what does decolonizing mean in a, in a very general sense, or in a political sense?

**Faisal:** Again, I think this is one of those words that looks different in Latin America, as opposed to the United States, as opposed to Africa, as opposed to different parts of Asia. This word is extremely context specific, and it depends on the particular historical relationships of domination that surrounded that particular relationship of colonization or imperialism. I think people mean very, very different things when they say it. We obviously know the, the classics, right? We, we've read our Cesare, we've read our Fanon. They mean something even between each other, quite different to each other when they use the term decolonization.

I think that historically we can kind of reserve it and I'm following, the Nigerian scholar Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò against decolonization to kind of reserve it, to refer to a moment when states that were literally formerly colonized and which had their land and administrative practices and resources directly exploited, not mediated through the kind of global market as we might have in contemporary imperialism, but directly exploited by colonizing powers achieved a modicum, and I'm hedging everything, right, a modicum of political independence. Political and to a certain extent, historically economic. I just saw the excellent scholar Charmaine Chua basically demonstrate that while that political and economic independence in those early moments of anti-colonial struggle went hand in hand, slowly over the course of the 20th century, they diverged in which a certain political independence was taken to be the aim of decolonization with an economic reintegration into a global market. And this is what we've seen happen in the formerly colonized, then decolonized, and now nation states around the world. That divergence is something that should also be remarked upon, I think, and is quite important.

**Darian:** Yeah. So, are the terms sovereignty and self-determination sort of key terms to understanding what decolonization means?

**Faisal:** Yeah, these are classic terms. I would say so.

**Darian**: Okay. And of course, yeah, those terms are also contested terms and highly, highly context dependent.

**Faisal:** We are having one of the most difficult conversations actually, on these terms and on these categories and on the historicity of, of their appearance and also their historical development and geographical development. I think we're having a quite difficult conversation and I don't want the listeners to think we're gonna arrive at a solution or that I am going to offer one. I really don't want us to think that. I think that this is ultimately going to be a conversation in which we tease out quite difficult things, but really, I don't think we're gonna arrive anywhere distinct or solid.

There is this really famous paper called “Decolonization is not a metaphor” by Tuck and Yang, right? And so, like that paper makes a great argument but from within the context very specifically of the US settler project and its relation to the indigenous populations of the United States. I've seen backlashes against that paper from Latin American scholars who think that that framework doesn't apply necessarily and if you look back to somebody like Fanon, who they disagree with in that paper, Tuck and Yang disagree with Fanon’s vision of decolonization, but Fanon had a different vision. And that's why I kind of don't want us to feel like there is a right answer to this here. When I say things, it's how I use these terms, I guess.

**Darian:** Yeah. I'm a sort of a believer in the idea that we can find some basic common denominators with regard to these terms, though. So, of course terms all have contextual dependence, they have richness that we’re obviously not gonna be able to capture, but we can sort of agree that, looking at the basic level, this is what we're talking about.

**Constance:** For me, the common denominators that I now distill from this, they’re independence, sovereignty, and always involving the colonized or the formerly colonized. Then it makes it very interesting how this term is being appropriated in the university discourse.

**Darian:** Well, I think you missed a term there, which is self-determination.

**Constance**: Right.

**Darian**: And I think sovereignty is something that applies generally to states. And self-determination it can be applied to states but applies to people. So, I think self-determination is also a really important term to hold onto there.

**Faisal:** I also really like, and that wasn't a term that came up in either of these, is Adom Getachew’s idea that that the decolonial moment was a moment of world making. I like that a lot as well, because it demonstrates that for at least in, the, the practical and theoretical exercises of many de-colonial or anti-colonial movements, it was very much not about remaking the world and finding the same space within that remade world, but about literally remaking the world. Making a different world in which the former rules which were colonially determined no longer applied at all, rather than simply getting a seat at the table, which is something that we usually think when we use words like sovereignty or self-determination. It's very much about this kind of equality of a league of nations. And in that Robert Owen book, there's the, the really great metaphor of like, when you go and you're filling in a, uh, any kind of form online, you get that dropdown list of all the countries, right? As if all those countries were equal, right? As if like every single, and they're alphabetical as well, just in order to make sure there's no issues. So, the US is at the end, you know? So I, I really like that that this is usually what people think of when they think of decolonization is that dropdown list.

**Darian:** So, getting added to that list.

**Faisal:** Just getting added to that list, right? But I do think that there, at least in the height of the decolonial moment, there was, or the anti-colonial moment is how I would call it I guess, there was something distinctly bigger at stake for a lot of people.

**Constance:** I think the trope of world making is probably more appropriate to the discourse that is happening in academic institution when it comes to decolonization, than more thinking about self-determination, sovereignty, and independence of states and people. So, I think this bigger picture of world making is I think what I could imagine is what many people are referring to when they talk about decolonizing a western institution or western academic institution.

**Darian:** Yeah, sure. yeah. I guess.

**Constance:** Alternatively, what would be the applications of sovereignty, self-determination, and independence in a western academic institution when we talk about decolonizing it?

**Faisal:** I mean, I think that a decolonized academy or a decolonized university is an abolished university.

**Constance:** Right, yeah.

**Faisal:** For real, this is the fundamental way that we can think about it. The university as it exists today, is a strictly colonial institution, even to the, to the level of who gets into what rankings at the university tables at the end of the year. This all has a, a post-colonial imprint on it in a way.

**Darian:** You need to explain that a bit more. So, when you say the university is fundamentally a colonial institution, I'm, I'm paraphrasing, did I get it more or less? Can you explain what you mean by that?

**Faisal:** I mean that we live in a world that is undoubtedly shaped by the histories and legacies of colonialism and colonial plunder very specifically, and many of our strong, strong and quotation marks universities in the world bear this mark. Hence, you have like a lot of this decolonize-the-university-movements as we understand them today, which began by asking for slave owner statues to be torn down at specific universities. You've got the Rhodes must fall campaign, et cetera. So, when we look at that, that is a kind of relatively material demand. We don't want a, a statue of a slave owner there. But does that actually take away the fact that these universities in many cases their entire history and legitimacy and global standing historically is contingent on those states having an impossibly far-reaching colonial power over most of the world, right? Like impossibly far-reaching. And I think that that is what I mean when I say that.

**Darian:** Yeah, I think that's pretty clear then. And I think also that clarifies the first thing you said, which was to decolonize the university or to have a means to abolish the university. So, for me that's a lot clearer, but as I presume that most of the working groups within this university are not interested in abolishing the university, then maybe we go back to that other question of, okay, what are we talking about then when we're talking about decolonizing a curriculum or decolonizing university, somewhere short of abolishing the university? And I, I understand exactly what you've said, I think in terms of why the university is a colonial institution. It's super clear but where does that leave us?

**Faisal:** I kick that one again back to you both, like what do you guys think that means? Because, I mean, for me it's always meant, at least in my academic training and practice, an attempt to recenter the history of colonialism into how we understand the world and not just recenter in the sense that we acknowledge it, no, we make it absolutely central to how we understand our world and our place within it today, right? So, this is how I've been trained to do it, but, uh, yeah, so that's kind of on my end. Uh, but I really would like to hear what you both think it means.

**Constance:** I was just thinking about it, and it's basically your definition is, I think the focus on recentering first on recognizing, learning, and unlearning and then reentering, I think these are like the main terms that come to mind in all the decolonizing calls and literature, you know, that I came across or in also in the working groups that I sat in, or I'm sitting in. But I also have to say, I think the abolishing the university call is, sounds radical, but I think when you look through the calls that come, or through the ideas that are being portrayed, there is a huge spectrum, which starts at a very minimal effort of indeed, rethinking the way we tell the histories that we tell, of the disciplines that we teach, but also of our own institution, but all the way to the point of basically complete revolution and the way we teach, but also in the way we see ourselves, reposition ourselves as an academic institution in the world. So, I think that is a whole spectrum and that is probably part of the reason why no one knows what to do with it. And also because when there is a spectrum and people wanna do something but don't want to go to the far end of the spectrum in the direction of abolishing, we end up with what for some people would feel like watered down versions or performative versions of decolonizing, which is like we add a person of color to our reading list, or we focus basically on European history, but now we have one extra assignment that also looks a bit outward to show that there was something else, right? So, these are also efforts in this, but seeing the spectrum and understanding that this is a way to do it. Like this is a way of getting away with saying, we worked on this, we considered it, but without actually addressing the elephant in a room.

**Faisal:** Yeah. And again, like abolition, it's a, it's a strong word. People think it means destruction, but I'm with Ruth Wilson Gilmore and the American radical black abolitionist tradition, which is that abolition is actually building alternatives to systems that are not working for everyone right now, right? And I think that is an important distinction. It doesn't mean just a destruction of anything. It means like how do we take all these lovely things that we experience in the university as scholars and students, and really make sure that those things are available to everyone?

**Constance:** They’re available to everyone. And relevant.

**Faisal:** And relevant. Yep.

**Constance:** To everyone. So how much destruction does it ask before you can rebuild it?

**Faisal:** Good question.

**Darian:** You talked about history a moment ago, and I really, I don't have any sort of anything like as good an answer as you or Constance just gave to this question of what does it mean to decolonize, but for me, history is perhaps the most important thing, right? That we start to teach and think about history in a different way. The history of the institution, the history of the states that we live in, the history of migration, all of these things. How do we do that though, concretely? I mean, and is that, is that enough? How do we teach history in such a way that it allows us to really, yeah, reorient our perspective? It has to be more than just what Constance said, so let's introduce another unit on world history, or let's introduce a unit on migration. I don't mean to be dismissive about those things, cause I think they're important at the same time. But also, that feels like it's missing the point in a way for me.

**Faisal:** I made a joke about it, like, a friend made this joke, and I totally agree with it actually, it’s that if we achieved our aims of decolonizing the university, then history departments would disappear because every department would be a history department in a way, right? And I think that's a really, that's a relatively important, it's like a joke, but I think there's something of truth to it.

**Darian:** Can you explain the joke a bit more?

**Faisal:** Okay, sure. Yeah. It's basically that, that history would become redundant if every department and every discipline, et cetera, made historical knowledge absolutely central to it, to its own development, it was kind of just in tune with what you were saying.

**Darian:** Mm-hmm.

**Faisal:** Yeah.

**Constance:** As a historian that answer makes me obviously very happy. But at the same time, you know, now we talked about the curriculum, but when I look at calls for decolonization or when I look at the content of decolonization programs of the university that is, you see calls for alternative methodologies for alternative epistemology, for how to deal with each other in the classroom when it comes to difficult conversations surrounding racism, or sensitivity surrounding certain terms or concepts that we use. So, how do we make sense of all of that? How do we deal with these kind of calls in the decolonizing discourse?

**Faisal:** Like, obviously I think all those things are really lovely. Anyway, I think all those things are extremely vital. I do it in my teaching all the time. I try to do it in my research. I attend to citation practices. I make sure if I'm in a classroom and a and a particular word comes up to say that we're not saying that word in class. These are all amazing. I just find it like a bit kind of disrespectful to people who have literally died in wars of liberation to call that decolonization just a little bit, like, that's just me and I find it a bit disrespectful for people to this day, living under extreme and violent conditions of decolonization around the world from the United States to Australia to Palestine. I find that as well a relatively disrespectfulish way to frame their particular struggles. I would say concretely again, why don't we go back to diversify, democratize … These are words that seem to address our particular demands a little better, at least the demands that you've just, listed Constance. These words seem to hit the point better.

**Constance:** So, we can use different words …

**Faisal:** Yeah.

**Constance:** … that are more appropriate to the actual real-life situations outside of the fairly cozy bubble of the university, while still addressing the very real concerns of staff and students.

What I quite often see, and you probably know that from my own experience, is that in the many working groups that they are, the labors often put on the shoulders of our staff and students of color.

**Faisal:** Yep. Uh, we have a joke about this, uh, us, us people of color, in our WhatsApp groups that you guys aren't invited to. We have, we have, we make jokes about this. Joking aside, I, I do think that that is one of the reasons that I personally don't find myself extremely excited when I'm invited to join any of these work in groups to want to join them anymore. I find many of them a way to kind of offset a certain guilt that some staff members might feel towards certain things, even when they're, even when the labor isn't exclusively done by people of color staff. So, there's this really good essay that turned into a book by another I referenced one Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò*, there's another* Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò and he has this really great essay that I teach to my students called “Being in the Room Privilege”. And he has this idea of what he calls epistemic deference which is, just because a scholar or a or a person really is of color, whether they are elite or not, and very often in the case that they are elite, end up shouldering the burden to speak for an entire group, which is a kind of deference politics, kind of very astutely isolates it, which ends up actually in the long run, sabotaging efforts to actually build more equitable places and, and new equitable spaces. It just ends up reinforcing that the spaces we have are the only ones we have, and all we need is just a few more people from that group in here in order to tell us what that group thinks. It doesn't actually entail anything radical.

**Constance:** So before when we were not recording you, you know, you said you know, I will just say you have to hire more black and people of color.

**Faisal:** That’s just so I don't feel lonely.

**Constance:** No. And my question is, because often, no, but you know, I have a point here, I have a point also where I'm going with this, you know, because what often happens is indeed, marginalized groups are put into these kind of working groups, to solve it instead of actually letting them do the job as researchers to actually solve it in the classroom and in publications and in the work that you do as academics.

**Faisal:** I don't think these working groups are a good thing in the long run personally. I'd rather just do a proper reading group or I would rather just dig in and do the work exactly as you said.

**Constance:** So, what then? You already said just do the work.

**Faisal:** Yeah, I, let's just do the work. Let's just like, actually do the work. And I do think that, hiring people with expertise and epistemologies, like a lot of people from the global south, it's not like you have to learn about colonialism, right? It's like your entire country's history in the present is distinctly shaped by the colonial and imperial enterprises, right? Like distinctly, the borders that you are living under are drawn in 1884 at the Berlin Conference. You know, like the, the, these things are just for many people around the world a living part of their life consistently. And so, it is impossible to come at the academic enterprise without making that, uh, a kind of, it's not, it's, it's literally impossible because it's, it's the animating force for many people, for why they got into academia in the first place, right? And I think having departments in which there are more people for whom colonialism is an absolutely central historical fact as opposed to something that should get referenced, or perhaps recentered, I think having more people like that in the wider academic space, I think that's probably for the better. Yeah.

**Constance:** And it's probably more productive than having everyone else that is already sitting here learn everything about world's colonial history by themselves.

**Faisal:** I mean, I think more people should do that for sure. Let's put it that way.

**Darian:** And that's because let's say those people, that expertise, it has the effect of what we called earlier world creation or world reorientation. Is that, is that what you're getting at, you mean?

**Faisal:** I think maybe. I'd love to see it first and see how it works out, you know what I mean?

**Darian:** I mean, cause I'm thinking like, you hire people and I'm thinking very concretely here at this university, right, where we have curricula that are pretty let's say euphemistically stable, right? So, it's very hard to make actual changes in the curricula. It's hard to bring in people and say, go do your thing, you know, that's why we brought you here. So, if we were really concretely speaking, we bring in more people of color, more black, more brown people, more let's say people from the colonized world, right? And then what do we do, right? And then we say, okay, you know, go and teach the courses that we've been teaching for the last 10, 15 years.

**Faisal:** I, and in my short experience at this university, the people who are most frustrated by this system are scholars from the formerly colonized world. I think there is a reason for that and it's a genuine frustration. It's a very deep frustration. And I think again, if we wanna go back to what, this is part of when I say that just decolonizing the curriculum is, is just such a strong word. Like, let's, let's maybe fight to have a little easier course changing policies. You know, it's like, start there. Let's like literally start there. Let's make it easier for newly hired professors from the south to change courses and not have to teach a lot of these things, which for many of us are literally offensive.

**Darian**: I felt this recently. So, my mother has been in Iran for quite, for a couple of months trying to sort out some family issues and I've been talking to people about it at work just because it's something to talk about, it's something going on in my life. Um, so I've been talking about the, the kind of various challenges that she's facing in dealing with Iranian bureaucracy and there's curiosity and certainly a kind of sensitivity because people, I think, care about me as a person. But also a kind of wall of incomprehension almost. And so, the lack of understanding or the lack of awareness of what it is like to live in other parts of the world, even from a, a legal or regulatory perspective, from an economic perspective. And I think when I have those kind of experiences and they're almost always well-meaning, I feel on the one hand there's certain type of fatigue, I feel a certain type of responsibility to try to explain something, and at the same time, I feel a real uncomfortableness as well. And I'm not sure exactly what the origin of that uncomfortableness is. It's from having to try to explain something always that, you know, is being seen as somehow sub-altern almost. You have some idea of what I, what I'm trying to explain here?

**Faisal**: Yeah. I mean, academically, we were talking about this the other day, I guess, is that academically even for scholars from non-Europe, let's call it the global majority, people are starting to call, it, which I like that one. For scholars from the global majority, in order to make it in academies, whether in Europe or in the homeland, you have to learn the canon of Europe. So, when you're talking about decolonizing curricula, et cetera, how can we do that with the disciplines that exist as we have them, right? So we have to learn that, but we also have to learn our own traditions and our own canons and I find that really interesting and I think that maybe is a, is a kind of academic mirror image to the thing that you're describing, is that it's very easy for scholars to write off the culture, and political activity, and history of other parts of the world, while maintaining that knowledge of the European is the cannon that you need to know, right? So, if we're calling that, I think there might be something to be, to, to be said about calling that decolonizing the cannon. Uh, at least, uh, in a, in a kind of expanded metaphorical sense. I think that there, there might be something to be said about that. But yeah, in regards to the experience that you've just described many people don't even, they can't, they, they keep calling me by other countries, by other Arab countries. They just, like any small Arab country, I think that people can only really keep one small, small Arab country, in their head at one moment. And these days it's Qatar for me, just because the World Cup just happened and it's on people's minds. But yeah, no, I kind of get it. It's that question, so what's it like growing up there? And you're just like, the same and different than everywhere else, just as everywhere. Is it the same and different from everywhere else? Is that kind of what you're getting at, Darian?

**Darian:** Yeah, I guess so. When I have these conversations, which I enjoy having, and people are, like I said, are genuinely often interested and, and caring, but then I also feel at the same time there's so much work to do to try to begin to explain things about, yeah, what it's like in all sorts of different ways. And also, that things are not so incredibly alien and completely different that comprehension or understanding is just impossible, right? That actually these are places, these are people like here, like you, like us, that have the same frustrations and concerns and, and at the same time many things are, different as well. So that's a sort of personal experience and I try to put that into an academic context that we're talking about now. I sometimes feel like, yeah, we don't want to talk about recentering, but this kind of, the effort to decenter, that effort of provincial our own experience, seeing it as particular is so great sometimes. And to try to lead other people down that path, which I think as you said, academics, black, and brown academics, academics of color are often asked to do, is a pretty exhausting thing. And I think it also, it asks for a sort of distance from the difficulty of doing it as well. I don't know if I'm expressing myself clearly.

**Faisal:** I think, yeah. I mean, the earlier thing you were describing, like Spivak, Gayatri Spivak, the Indian American post-colonial scholar, has theorized it as sanctioned ignorance. That's, that's her term for it. It's, it's an ignorance that is officially sanctioned because you don't need to go beyond it actually in order to make it, you, you just need to do the thing that you do and you don't need to expand that necessarily, right? And I think there's something to that.

**Darian:** Yeah, I think that, sorry, that term of sanctioned ignorance is really a kind of interesting and important one because also you feel almost, I feel almost apologetic that I'm being asked to explain something beyond what people have to know. I feel as though on the one hand there is all this discussion and emphasis on decolonization, on, all the things that we've been talking about up to now. On the other hand, there's just seems this basic stuff that people could find out just by reading different news sources, by reading slightly different history sources and don't. And so, we are put in this sort of almost apologetic space of having to ask somebody to, to think about something slightly differently.

**Faisal:** I think it's asking academics to think slightly differently. I think that's why it's so difficult because every academic thinks that they are God's prophet on earth, right? And you see it with a lot of academics when, when you hear the kinds of pushback that students give them about this stuff, the amount of defensiveness and even aggression towards students that a lot of academics take. How dare that student tell me what I should be knowing or what I should be teaching? I think there's a genuine danger there, actually.

**Darian**: Mm-hmm.

**Faisal**: Like, and I don't think that making a decolonization working group is gonna fix that academic's attitude or their response to what, at the end of the day, are genuine student concerns about their education not matching up with what they know about the world. And this is, I think what we're facing a lot in Europe is that our current generation is a student population that was stuck at home during an unprecedented global pandemic, as the George Floyd uprising was. They know their world does not correspond to what they're learning in school. They're, they're facing down the anxiety of the climate crisis. They know that the climate crisis is being unevenly distributed to different populations around the world, they're feeling relatively powerless about these things, and they come in and they ask for their education to start to reflect that world, which they are kind of in a way, forced to confront. And their academic education overall just simply does not give them that. It is something that is stuck in models, in, uh, disciplines that at this point, in many cases, are purely, inconsequential to the challenges we're going to face in the coming years and the students know this.

**Constance:** I really like the metaphor of provincial yourself. I think it makes perfect sense because what you were just describing in our students, they have, for whatever reason, the context in which they have grown up, they are provincialized already because of the Covid 19 pandemic, the climate crisis, because of all of that. Whereas I think most of our teaching staff here, they're quite scared of the daunting intellectual effort of provincializing yourself, when you are raised in a context in which you are the center, in which the knowledge that you learn is the center, in which the knowledge that you teach is the center in which knowledge that you create is the center.

**Darian:** Yeah, of course. I, I wanna wake up every morning and read the New York Times and think, okay, that's what I need, right? That's, you know, what was it that Hegel said? That's the, the philosopher's daily prayers are to read the newspapers and think, okay, now I've got the information that I need to go out there and do my job and to get on with the world, or to get on with being an academic in the world. And I think this notion of provincializing, that's not enough actually. And that's not giving you the full story. And I, I think that's a pretty basic intuition. But for myself at least, I speak as an academic, that's hard to get my head around. And sometimes when you're sort of hit with just a news source even from, from somewhere else, that gives you a different perspective, those are really basic terms. But I think we shouldn't denigrate them in, in favor of trying to have some sort of super sophisticated, complex conversation. It's really just about shifting your perspective a little bit, about trying to understand life experiences that are not your own or those of your immediate surroundings. I think that's a really, really difficult thing actually.

**Faisal:** Yeah, and I think, again, we know this from academic panels and the Q&A section. It's very hard for an academic not to ask a question that isn't about their own research, right? It's almost impossible, unfortunately, for an academic to ask a question that doesn't come from their own research expertise, right? And so, in Europe, I've literally attended panels where you've got a young scholar doing this amazing archival work on like third world correspondences in like eight different languages. And then the Q&A is all about either Europe, or Europe's vision of these places. This is so common.

**Darian:** Yeah. So, one of the things that we seem to always be coming back to in this podcast is this kind of conflict, and we don't, I mean, we're discussing whether it's a real conflict, a manufactured conflict between the let's say, we talk about the woke population or the woke students or woke academics versus the let's say more traditional old left, maybe social democratic population of academics. And I think that one of the things that kind of comes up in that conversation, this relates also to questions that we've been talking about now about not just decolonization, but about diversifying the curriculum, about all of these kind of working groups and efforts we engage in, is that they're linked oftentimes to a kind of identity politics, right? And I think one of the biggest critiques coming from what we would call the quote unquote old left, is that these identity politics and with it, this emphasis on diversifying the curriculum come with a focus or even an obsession with difference. So, an obsession on difference between groups, difference between individuals, and as well with an obsession or a real focus on group rights or individual rights over a, a kind of universal struggle that the old left, and I, I'm thinking here, yeah, I mean, sort of old left, we would maybe, even if it said a Marxist left, thought of itself as being, involved in. And it even sometimes goes beyond that to say, well, actually these concerns with diversification, these concerns with recognizing, the claims of individuals or of groups are linked to even a kind of individualism or economic liberalism. Because what they're concerned with really is admission to the game of the market under equal or even preferential terms. And they're concerned with that rather than a real transformation of labor relations, of social relations, or of productive relations. We started this conversation, we're talking about how you were a Marxist post-colonial scholar, and I wonder how taking a Marxist perspective on these questions, especially in relation to race and class and the relationship between race and class changes this, how does that perspective respond to these kinds of questions or potential objections?

**Faisal:** I think that's a, that's a good question, but I, I really can only answer it with a rhetorical question that will make the original suppositions of that question, that will make their absurdity immediately apparent. What is worse for building progressive collective social futures? Is it liberal identity politics, or is it contemporary capitalism's tendency to racialize, gender, marginalize diverse populations in very specific ways that are very often, historically directed, yeah? What is worse? I would say the latter is actually much worse for our attempts to build just collective futures than liberal identity politics. I think that we are living in a world that clearly, racializes populations, right? Clearly has, genders populations, clearly marginalizes populations, and on top of that makes them market dependent without giving them access to the market in the way that they need to comfortably survive and thrive. So, if it does entail racialized populations, which are completely dependent on the market, but don't have the same access to it as everyone else, as, as the white populations, let's call things by their name. If we are in that position and a step is to get those people access so they can survive and get those groups access so they can survive. Oh, I don't think that's too much of a bad thing. But I do think that at the core of it is this system which tends towards the racialization, marginalization and difference constructing of populations in order to say that that these ones have access, and these ones don't, right? Does that answer your question?

**Darian:** I, I think so. I mean, the short way of putting it, I guess, would be that you're kind of calling bullshit on this attempt to make distinction or even polarization between, on the one hand a critique of capitalism and on the other hand emphasis on questions of race, gender, and marginalized communities.

**Faisal:** I mean, Stuart Hall said it better than anyone, and it's at this point becomes such a truism that you get tired of repeating it because you see it cited in all the good essays is that the way he put it is that race is the modality through which class is lived, right? And when he says that I think most people take him to mean that race is that black, and brown, and diverse populations who are racialized live their racialization as a class issue. But I think a more productive way would be to think that he's talking about whiteness, is that, that race is in a way modulated through access to a certain predisposition of having a much better life. Let's put it that way.

**Constance:** So, in this episode, we talked about colonized people, colonized territories, what it means to be a colonized subject. Are you a colonized subject?

**Faisal:** So, in Europe, I am definitely a racialized subject. It was like my second week here before somebody yelled at me to speak Dutch in Dutch. It was literally my second week here. So racialized 100% in this part of the world, right? But racialized in a specific way because at the end of the day, I am a tenure track academic and so relatively better off than most people. As for colonized, again, to go back to the points I was making at the opening of this, like we literally are living in a world where people in, in Raza are stuck in a siege that has gone on for as long as I can remember and are getting bombed annually. And it just feels weird for me to say I'm a colonized subject today. Am I a post-colonial subject? I am here speaking English to you in an English that is way better than my Arabic. Is there something there? I think for sure. Is there a reason in that I speak English and pursued an education in the United States, in the United Kingdom when one of them has military bases in my country and the other had a long protectorate agreement with my country? I think there is a very good explanation that links those things but call myself currently colonized is a bit of a stretch.

**Constance:** I think what I take away is that decolonization isn't a metaphor and we should be careful when using it like that. If we want to diversify, which is apparently the better term, or which maybe we should consider as a better term than decolonization or decolonize. So, if we wanna diversify, we have to give space to those that bring the diversity to this institution, whether that's a student, or staff. That, we have to all of us do something with what it means the intellectual effort to provincialize others and ourselves depending on our own positionality in this and that we should not forget the point of access.

**Darian**: Thanks so much, Faisal, for taking the time to speak to us. We really appreciate it and I hope we can continue the conversation at a later date.

**Faisal:** Thanks both for having me on and yeah, uh, made a struggle for liberation. Continue at pace.

**[End of recording]**