

The Pedagogies for Social Justice podcast

Remi-Joseph Salisbury

Transcribed by www.premiertyping.com, alison.mcpherson@premiertyping.com

Interviewer – Italics

Interviewee – Normal

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Thank you for tuning in to the Pedagogies for Social Justice podcast, brought to you by a student-staff partnership at the University of Westminster. This is a platform for students and educators to exchange knowledge and encourage discussion about the current challenges facing higher education. I'm your host, Kyra, and, for this episode, I'll be in conversation with Dr Remi Joseph Salisbury, a Presidential Fellow in Ethnicity & Inequalities at the University of Manchester, whose interests lie particularly in racism and anti-racism in the context of education and policing. In this episode, we delve into Remi's academic background in the Social Sciences and where his anti-racist thinking and work began. We have the opportunity to discuss his report called 'Decriminalise the Classroom', which looks specifically at the effects of police presence in Greater Manchester schools. And, finally, Remi gives us some ideas on how we might begin to decolonise educational research.

Hi Remi! Thank you so much for joining me on this episode of the podcast. It's so nice to finally meet you. How are you doing today?

I'm good, thank you. Glad to be part of the podcast, glad to be invited, and really nice to chat to you!

So, I like to start things off with our guests just sharing a little bit about themselves. So, first things first, where are you from?

I'm from Manchester, grew up in Manchester, and now I'm back working in Manchester, so not far from where I grew up.

Nice. And how would you kind of describe your upbringing in terms of how race was kind of seen and felt in your household?

That's a good question. So, it was present before I was born. Race was...coming from a mixed race family, race was there. It was there in conversations that family members had before I was born about the...what they saw as dangers or risks in bringing a mixed race child into the world, and that that might mean for the family, and what that might mean for the individual. So, even before I was born, it was there.

And then, from very early on, I think race was a significant feature in my life. I was one of the only people of colour at my primary school. And...I had some negative experiences that...that entered the home when I sought support from my parents, but also I had some incredibly positive experiences as well. I mean, I've spoken about this elsewhere before, but my dad, who is white, when he learnt about the racist experiences that I was facing, he bought me a Nigeria shirt and, you know, we both loved football – that was...that was one of the things we interacted and bonded over, and that was his way of opening up a conversation about me being proud about where my family are from and my roots. So, although we didn't really, as a family, we didn't often discuss race and racism really explicitly, in the sense that my parents aren't...committed to anti-racism in the same way that I am, it was there and there were little things that the family did to...to encourage me to think about race positively.

And then – I mean, I could go on and on with this question, but there's also...there's other sides of it where I was also incredibly exoticised as a mixed race kid with, you know, kind of golden hair at that

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time, which, again, there's something uncomfortable about that, that, you know, we would be stopped in the streets and people would remark on us being a mixed race family and, you know, this thing about mixed race kids somehow being... particularly cute, and this discourse you often hear, people saying they want mixed race babies [laughing], kind of detached from they want to be part of a multi-racial family, that they just want a mixed race baby.

So, yeah, there's a whole range of ways that race featured in my life, and these are just thoughts that come to mind. The way race works, as you know, is that it's so deeply rooted that it shapes our ways and lives that we can hardly grasp and come to terms with.

Yeah. No, absolutely, I agree. And, you know, I'm happy that you were able... that your parents were able to support you and be there for you in the way that they could, like growing up, because I think a lot of – not many mixed race children can say the same for their parents. And I completely agree with like the exoticised like... of mixed race kids. Like I remember, like growing up, my mum used to be told like, "Oh, you're so lucky that she has like nice hair!" and things like that, and it's like... just the little kind of like micro-aggressions, and things that you look back at it now as an adult and you're like... that was messed up [laughing].

Yeah, again, there's a lot of that stuff, and even my time at university, those... eh... exoticification... that exoticification was there. I was exoticised and... I mean, I didn't particularly complain about it at the time and, in some ways, I was thankful for the attention, but when you look back, you know, those things... those things also need questioning sometimes too.

Yeah, absolutely. So, do you feel like you had access to kind of like good representations of people that looked like you growing up? I know you said that you were the only child of colour like in your primary school, but maybe like in high school, what was your kind of environment like then, and what were the representations you were exposed to?

So, I grew up in a majority white area. It's still a majority white area now, but it's actually more diverse than when I was younger. But the school that I went to, my secondary school, was... still racially mixed. There was a significant Bengali population as well as the majority white population. There was very few black students. There was a black mixed race teacher. But whether I saw that teacher as a role-model or found any inspiration in him... I don't think that was the case really. I understand how representation can be important, but the teacher that inspired me, that really turned my schooling around, was a white teacher who saw it as part of her duty to support all students and pay particular attention to those students that might be at the margin, for whatever reason. So, I do think representation is important. I've argued this in my work: we should be getting more people of colour into teaching positions, and in positions of authority, positions where they can be role-models, but, at the same time, I think we can... find... forms of representation, forms of inspiration, elsewhere as well, which isn't... again, not to say it wasn't important to me. I always remember the first poster I had on my wall as a child was a Craig David poster, and, you know, looking back, I imagine that racialisation played a role in what drew me to Craig David.

But then, as I got a little bit older, I was more interested I think in people's ideas, so I was inspired by Malcolm X and Martin Luther King because I think [my first]... often, in Britain, our exposure to anti-racism leads us to think about the US. From there, I was interested in Bob Marley, and I particularly was inspired by Linton Kwesi Johnson's music in high school, and that really... allowed me to understand the way that race and racism works in Britain. So, representation wasn't always there, but I think I've been able to find sites of inspiration.

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So, do you feel like you were ever in a position where you had to kind of navigate or negotiate your racial identity like in school, or was it always something that you were pretty sure of because of like the books that you read, the music that you listened to and things like that, outside of school?

Em...I think it's something that I would...negotiate, consciously or unconsciously. It's something that we're often negotiating, particularly people of colour or people like myself who can be racialised ambiguously – people are not always certain what my heritage is. And, again, I guess this shows how important football was in my life as I was growing up, but one...one event at school that I remember is England played Nigeria in the World Cup, I think 2002, to give an indication of how old I am [laughing]. That was early in my time at secondary school, and it was a big occasion, and we were allowed to miss lessons to watch this football game, and there was an awful lot of attention on me as that was happening, and people were wondering what does it mean for me to be English, to live in England, but to also have Nigerian family, and, you know, there were some...comments there that weren't great, but some of it as well was, you know, people were interested and...but in that, you know, I positioned myself as proud to have Nigerian heritage and, you know, that was important for me to do. So, I think it's often something that's been...negotiated, and, for me, it's often been about affirming a sense of pride, which was something that I think myself and my friends who were majority mixed race black and Bengali we felt, but also outwardly demonstrated a sense of pride, and that was partly in the face of sometimes being in a...slightly hostile environment.

And just on this topic, could you perhaps give us like a bit of a breakdown of like your academic background, like where would say your journey into like the Social Sciences and anti-racist work kind of begins?

Yeah. So, my journey into the Social Sciences is down to a lot, an awful lot of chance. When I went to college, sixth form, 16 to 18, I was most interested in English, partly because I'd been inspired by John Agard's poetry in secondary school actually. But I studied English – that's what I went to do, that's what I was interested in, and then I also did Psychology and Law. But almost half of my time at college I was playing for a football academy, and my priorities lay there, a lot more than they should have done. Long story short, I was kicked out of my Psychology class, essentially failed it, and needed to find a new class. A new Sociology teacher had come to the college at this time, and it was a recruitment day – people were signing up for their courses, and someone pulled me over to speak to this Sociology teacher, basically said, "This student has got no class and this teacher has got no students in his class, so why don't we see what we can do here?" And, at that point, I didn't even know what Sociology was, but I just went along with it – not that interested, still really thinking about my football and just anything to allow me to carry on doing that. And it's crazy now, all these years later [laughing], that that chance encounter, I now work as a sociologist. You know, I spent 10 years studying Sociology and now I'm working and continue to study Sociology, so, yeah, it always strikes me how much that came down to chance.

In terms of anti-racism, I think I had that interest there from a young age. I remember, around age 11 or 12, I pushed for my local football team to warm up in the kind of "Kick it out", "Kick Racism out of Football" t-shirts. That's one of the first kind of anti-racist interventions I can remember, trying to make, you know, in my environment, in a majority white football team, it felt significant at the time and it was something that was I proud of. But I really I think started to develop what I hope is a more critical and sophisticated understanding of racism not until, you know, the latter stages of my degree, my Master's, and then particularly during my PhD, where I think I became less focused on individual forms of racism, more concerned about structural, institutional racism, and also less seeing it just through my own lived experience but thinking about how, nationally and globally, different communities are affected by race and racism.

Yeah. Thank you. So, at what point do you feel like your opinion of the institution or like just the education system in general kind of changed – like was it during your time as a student, like you said, or when you actually came to work in higher education?

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Em...probably the PhD phase is where I was most struck by that. So, undergraduate, I went to Edge Hill University, and, at that time, they didn't have... I studied Sociology. They didn't have any modules on race and racism at all. They maybe had one week on a module about identity, [where there] was one week on race that I think...it would be interested to see it played back, but, from memory, I think it was incredibly limited. But, at that time, I...I wasn't particularly critical, and because it wasn't there, I didn't know it was missing. It's not something, you know, I was really actively questioning. But looking back, you know, I was incredibly disappointed.

By the PhD, I think...through my Master's, I was getting more and more involved in community activism and started to ask more and more questions, and I went into the PhD thinking, you know, this...Sociology gives an opportunity to work with activist communities, to really work for social justice, and across the course of the PhD, I just became more and more disillusioned that I didn't see the academics in the Department doing that, that there was...seemed like a real disconnect between the Department and local communities affected by the kinds of issues that the Department wrote about, be that racism, disability, so on and so forth. So, that's when I started to have a more critical take on the university, but, since then, I think I've found more and more people who are working in academia but are doing so in critical ways, where they're working with...with and for resistance movements and trying to find ways to transform the institution and to work outside of the institution. So, overall, I think that, higher education, there's an awful lot of questions to be asked, but I also think it's important to recognise that there are people using the space to do important work.

So, is there anything that you wish you knew then that you kind of know now, like were there any expectations that you had for certain things?

I think it would have been good to know earlier – and this will seem obvious to a lot of people, but it would have been good to know earlier than not all sociologists are committed to social justice, and not all sociologists, certainly, not all sociologists are anti-racist, and that a lot of the most incisive knowledge comes from outside of the university. The person I often speak about and have been inspired by a lot recently is Ambalavaner Sivanandan, who directed the Institute of Race Relations. He never worked in a university, but is at the heart of some of the ideas about race and racism and anti-racism that...that inspired me and shaped my own practice.

And lastly, what kind of advice would you give to students kind of demanding like justice and equality in their institutions, like particularly like those institutions that are more kind of disinclined?

The first thing I would always say is to try and build a collective. It's almost cliché to say but we're so much stronger when we work together. It means that we have people to rally round if we become under threat, because sometimes this work is risky and the institution or the media or whoever can lash back against us, as we saw with, you know, the students campaigning for Rhodes Must Fall, for example. This work is not always easy, but it's slightly easier as part of a collective.

And I'd also say that those collectives – and this partly on academics perhaps more than students – these collectives should see academics and students working together, senior academics supporting early-career academics, early-career academics and senior academics supporting students, students supporting students in an earlier stage of their studies, because those different positions, different positions within higher education, all have slightly different pressure points or a different set of issues that we can support each other on.

And, beyond that, I would say...challenge. It's important to ask questions, to not take things for granted, which is something I think, as I say, I did a bit as an undergraduate, not take things for

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granted – things don't have to be the way that they are, and we should be fighting for things to change.

And I guess a big one, as well, I would...I really hope that campaigns, student campaigners, all of us involved in resistance movements, with a focus on higher education, that, although thinking about the curriculum and representation amongst teachers is important, we also should be asking big questions about student fees – why are students paying for education, something that should fundamentally and unequivocally be free? We should be thinking about the connections between our universities and the military, the police, the role our universities play in propping up borders and surveillance and the Prevent duty, for example. All these issues I think have to be at the centre of our demands and thinking alongside those curricula issues and representation issues.

And, just moving on, given everything that kind of went on in 2020 for the Black Lives Matter movement and Say Her Name, we've seen a lot of attacks on like critical race theory in the UK and the US, particularly like in our Conservative Government, thinking about like Kemi Badenoch's speech, the race report. I wanted to dedicate some time to talking about these conversations, and I guess some of their consequences as well, with you today. So, in 2021, the Education Committee published a report called 'The Forgotten – how white working-class pupils have been let down and how to change it'. Obviously, we're used to having conversations about like BAME under-achievement and the attainment gap, so these reports have essentially kind of flipped that on its head and makes it kind of seem as though there's too much focus on students of colour and equality on that end. So, my first question is: what do you think are some of the implications of these kind of discourses about forgotten white working-class?

Yeah. It's...a good question, a big question. One thing to say is that this isn't new, you know. It's been...this discourse of the white working-class as the left-behind, it's been bubbling for a few years. You know, people like David Gillborn were writing about it. A while ago, there was an edited collection put together by the [R?] Trust that really pushes back against this idea.

And another thing to say is...it's very real. It has real consequences. So, when I was doing my research on racism in schools, I spoke to a few teachers who saw themselves as following directives or policies that encouraged them to pay particular attention to white working-class, so-called white working-class, white working-class students, and what this meant, in one classroom, for example, is that white working-class students, largely just white students generally, were sat nearer to the teacher, closer to the front, and it was the racially-minoritised teachers who were sat at the back. I asked, you know, why is this the case, and the teacher told me it's because a DfE, Department for Education, concern is the education of the white working-class, and the teachers' sense is that those that sit closer to the teacher are more engaged and the teacher is able to keep a closer eye on them. So, these discourses, it's not just ideas out there that people are talking about – they're impacting on the way that people are educated.

There's a range of problems with this idea. I think, most obviously, it pitches the interests of the so-called white working class against the interests of...members...segments of the working-class who are racially-minoritised or migrants. So, it's a zero-sum game between these two groups.

Far more productively, I think we should see it as...if we want to see it in this binary way, between the dispossessed and disenfranchised more broadly, against capitalism as a system, or against elites, because there's, you know, in these...our working-class communities are multiracial. People of colour are more likely to be working-class because we know...capitalism, it's racialised, and...and it positions...working-class, the so-called white working-class as the real victims of this system, and when they're positioned as the real victims of this system, it means more attention is potentially paid to them, but also that the significance of race and racism is denied or erased because, if it's the white working-class who are being negatively affected, then racism...the existence of racism is brought into question or seen to be insignificant. And it's also led to this slippage where politicians now sometimes

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talk about “the working-class”, and what they’re actually trying to do is talk about the white working-class, and that’s encoded in the language, and it’s incredibly disingenuous and...and shows a real disregard for the actual demographics, for the actual shape of the country, and there’s this, you know, kind of tied to this myth of...racially-minoritised people being, you know, part of these metropolitan elites. It’s just...it’s just fanciful.

The other thing to say – I know this is becoming a long answer, but just to add something else to it – is that the white working-class, so-called, also become scapegoated in certain contexts. So, Brexit is the most obvious example. Although a significant number of the votes for Britain to leave the EU came from the white middle-classes, the discourse, the immediate/media commentary, and commentary a long time after, suggested that was a problem – that was the white working-class voting, the white working-class who had concerns about people of colour, it’s the white working-class that are racist and it’s the white working-class’ fault that Britain left the EU. And this, again, this is another myth that shows the connections between race and class are quite complicated and I think it’s important that we push back on that and recognise that racism exists, significantly, amongst the white middle-classes as well.

This is the last [laughing], last bit I’ll say on this. It always makes me think of a Linton Kwesi Johnson song called ‘Blame it upon the Working Class’, and in that, he says – I’m paraphrasing here – don’t blame it on the black working-class, Mr Racist, blame it on your racist boss, blame it on the ruling-class. Now, that was in the ‘80s, so there has been challenge to these ideas for a long time.

Yeah. Thank you so much for just unpacking like all of those elements that, yeah, like you said, like we need to have these conversations and they’re important. How does demonising CRT kind of impact calls to address other forms of institutional racism, like does that undermine them and to what extent?

Yeah, the attacks on CRT I think are...very, very interesting. It de-legitimises the voices, critical voices, with regards to racism. It casts doubt before we speak about what we have to say. You know, I think of someone like David Gillborn here, who’s done...who does the most rigorous...rigorous, detailed and careful, evidenced research, important research in education, and works in the critical race theory tradition. This...these attacks on critical race theory make it more difficult for someone like that to speak and to cut through and be heard. It’s already difficult for critical race theorists to be heard and cut through because our society is set up in a way as to insulate itself from...from efforts to draw attention to racism. But this is...this has really accelerated that. It’s made the space for critical voices increasingly narrow.

And it’s also tied up with, interestingly, attacks on Black Lives Matter, attacks on the very concept of institutional racism. It’s worrying. It’s a worrying time, when our Government are suggesting that people shouldn’t be going into schools teaching about these ideas, because these ideas are essential to our ability to transform the society we live in, which is a deeply unequal, racially unequal, society.

It’s also quite revealing, I think. For me, the Government’s attacks on the concept of institutional racism indicates to me, if we look at this Government’s track-record, their concern about institutional racism suggest to me that that is an incredibly important concept – they are worried about that concept. They’re worried about communities of resistance understanding and using that concept to explain the injustices we face. So, for me, it should...push us to grasp onto that concept, to all understand it, and it’s an incredibly useful framework to understand the injustices we’ve faced in recent years.

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So, for you, if kind of teaching this, if teaching CRT and like anti-capitalism is kind of like the new moral panic in education, how do we kind of switch from this moment where everyone's worried about it, it's a moral panic, to a moment of like real, genuine like education reform?

Mm, yeah. So, firstly, we call out the moral panic. We...we challenge it head-on. We have to challenge it head-on because it's completely unfounded, fanciful. You know, Kemi Badenoch's talking about critical race theory. I can't imagine that she has read Derek Bell or David Gillborn or Delgado, you know, some of the heavy-hitters, Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberlé Crenshaw. Even the tradition of critical race theory is being used as a kind of catch-all term for any anti-racist critique, and we need to challenge that because that's a dangerous, dangerous society we're moving into, where you can't raise concerns about racism that...that kills, to put it bluntly.

But, again, to go back to my previous answer, we should also understand what it signifies. It signifies that there is something in these concepts and these ideas that worry...that worries our Government. If we look at what this Government does, if we look at what this Government says that it wants to do – it wants more prisons, more police, it wants harsher conditions for migrant communities – it's a deplorable Government! So, if this Government is concerned about these concepts, those of us committed to social justice should be rushing to...to grasp these concepts.

And I think we...we should be fighting to transform mainstream education and transform our universities, our secondary schools and colleges, but, as importantly, I think we should be supporting community education, alternative education. You know, there's been an awful lot of political education going on recently as part of the "Kill the Bill" mobilisations, the work that the feminist activist group Sisters Uncut have been doing, and those forms of education, whether – traditionally, I think they would be in community centres, but they've largely been online because of the pandemic. But that community-focused form of education is something that we should really look to continue to grow.

I also wanted to dedicate some time to talking about the report that you co-authored called 'Decriminalise the Classroom – a Community Response to Police in Greater Manchester Schools'. Now, you carried out this research in 2020, so the data is very much recent and representative of the nature of Greater Manchester schools today, and for me personally, as someone that went to a secondary school in like the deprived side of West London, like I know exactly what it feels like to have school-based police and like turning up to school in the morning and you see police searching and screening like all your friends, so like when I read the report, like a lot of the themes and respondent stories like resonated with me, but I think it shows that, you know, this isn't like an isolated issue happening in just a few schools or something that used to happen in the past – like it's widespread and it's happening now and obviously it's getting worse. But cycling back to the beginning, I guess, I wanted to just understand like the beginning stages of the report and when did you personally start to look into kind of like school-based policing in Manchester, and what kind of like triggered your concern?

Yeah. So, the research I mentioned earlier that I was doing on racism in secondary schools, I was interviewing teachers in schools across Greater Manchester. I didn't really have police in schools on my radar at that time, but almost every time I went to do an interview, I found a police officer at the school reception or a police car driving round the car-park or just, in some capacity, either entering or leaving or walking around the school, and I was really struck by how omnipresent the police seemed to be in schools, and that people didn't seem to be talking about it very much. And, around this time, we had some community events for some of the access groups that I'm involved in, particularly around policing, and, at two separate events, young people, young people of colour, mentioned that there were police officers at their schools and that they were having a hard time and that racism was...a factor shaping their experiences with these police officers. And my good friend, Roxy Legane, she was also doing a Master's dissertation at the time, where she was speaking to leaders about this issue.

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So, off the back of those concerns raised by young people, we put in a Freedom of Information request to Greater Manchester Police and found that they had plans to really roll out more police officers across the region so...and this is without any meaningful consultation. So, from there, we organised a campaign, a “No Police in Schools” campaign, which has been incredibly energising, with a whole range of people involved – young people, teachers, community members, youth workers, teachers who are union members, you know, a whole diverse range of people from across the region. And we started raising the alarm about this, and as we did so, we heard more and more concern.

And as part of that, in the absence of much of an evidence-base in the UK, and in Greater Manchester particularly, we decided to do a report where we spoke to...we sought responses from people from across Greater Manchester, and, from that, we learnt that, firstly, people didn't know this was happening, and, secondly, the majority of people were very, very concerned about it, and there are particular concerns for students of colour and LGBTQ students particularly, trans-students, and also working-class students more generally. And, significantly, we learned that this wasn't taking place, as you might imagine, in all schools, but in schools in working-class areas, and particularly working-class areas with significant populations of colour.

Yeah. And you had 420 respondents complete the survey, which is like amazing, but also like a lot of data!

Yeah!

What was the process of like going through all of those responses and like how long was it before you actually began to like get into the analysis of like your findings?

Yeah, it was an awful lot of data. We didn't quite know how many responses we'd get back, and this was, you know, kind of outside of our academic work or our...working time. So, there were points where I thought, wow, we've bitten off more than we can chew here because 420 respondents sounds like a lot in its own right, but when each response is qualitative and people really had things to say, there's an awful lot to process. The report itself is quite long – it's probably longer than is generally suggested that a report should be, but it could have been three or four times as long. People had so much to say that it was hard to decide to leave some of it out. But the responses we had impressed upon us how important it was to say something and how these concerns cut across so many different segments of society. The report was...it was a significant undertaking, it really was, but it's also one of the pieces of work that I'm most proud of because I think...people have spoken about it a lot, and I know it's been picked up in schools, and other community groups have looked at it, and, you know, there are now people talking about setting up “No Police in Schools” campaigns in other areas. And it's important that we hold the State to account on things like this and present some of the concerns that communities have about...about decisions that are going to impact upon those communities. So, yeah, a huge piece of work, but definitely one that I'm pleased to have been involved in.

And, you know, in the media, we've been exposed to this kind of idea that police in schools are like the solution to like youth violence and like gang involvement, and there's a lot of MPs and the Home Office, just in general, who share this view and are creating these like really aggressive like strategies that are obviously more harmful in the long run. Do you feel like increasing the presence of police in schools as a response to youth violence is like a guise for something else – like is it a policy that's come out of like pure intentions to end youth violence or do we need to have reservations about kind of the aims with this?

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I think we should have reservations because political decisions are often made thinking about... thinking about election cycles and thinking about being seen to be doing something, rather than actually doing something. So, from the perspective of a cynical politician, they might see the...they might hold the position that what's needed is to have a kind of quick, immediate response, which is putting police in schools – we're concerned about this, we're addressing it, we're doing that very quickly. And they might see that as something that...will appeal to voters. What would be a lot more effective in actually tackling these problems, tackling problems of violence, would be to invest in communities, to invest in schools in positive ways, to invest in community centres that have been gutted, in libraries, to put more teachers in schools, more mental health services at a time where young people in particular are facing a mental health crisis, but that takes...that's a long-term vision that makes...that is challenging to articulate, and I don't think we have politicians, particularly now, with the kind of demise of the left of the Labour Party, I don't think we have politicians that are able or prepared to make those cases. And I should also say there that, even at that time, the left of the Labour Party were not really coming out strong against the increased powers and increased presence of the police, though I would have had a little more hope at persuading some of those politicians to the virtue of more progressive, positive interventions. So, I think we should always question what politicians' real intentions are. You know, we don't have to look far to see evidence that these politicians can't be trusted. And there's plenty of evidence, you know, people like Adam [?], who argue very persuasively that the police are very, very ineffective, very ineffective. There's no evidence to suggest that the police...putting police in schools, or even increasing the number of police, is a way to tackle social problems. The evidence we do have really is that they have very little effect at all. So, the evidence is there, but the political will is not, I'd say.

Jumping back a bit, another thing to say is to recognise that violence takes on many forms. So, the Government might be concerned about serious youth violence, and of course we should be concerned about any form of interpersonal violence, but we should also be concerned about state violence, we should be concerned about the lives that have been lost as a consequence of violent Government policies that have killed through placing people in poverty, on the breadline, the violence of Grenfell – all of these forms of violence perpetuated by those in power need our attention too. So, that's important to say.

Yeah. And do you feel like school-based police officers do more to kind of deter young people away from criminal behaviour or fast-track them into the criminal justice system?

The concept of the school to prison pipeline is one that I think is really, really useful, which points to the way that our schools, our education system, can prepare and funnel people into prisons. What we know at the moment is prisons are being expanded, so there's a creation of more prison places. We know that prisons in the UK are more privatised than in most of Europe, so there's a whole range of economic interests in there. From that, we can suggest that, those expanded prison places, there are vested interests in them being filled.

At the same time, our Government are placing more police in schools. Police are a gateway, a key gateway, into the criminal justice system, into the prison system. And we've got evidence from the US to show that placing police in schools is a significant contributing factor in the school to prison pipeline, and that that pipeline is racialised and classed as well – so, it's not all young people being funnelled into prisons, but some young people, some young people from...particularly from minoritized communities. And the big issue here, and this comes out a lot in the report, is that what school-based police officers are getting involved in is not this violence that the Government claims to be concerned about - [because that's not taking] place in the schools as well, is one thing to say – but it is minor behaviour issues that, in the past, would have been dealt with with a detention or maybe even less, just a talking-to. You know, we heard recently about a school-based police officer getting involved in an incident in a school here in Greater Manchester because a young black boy had an afro-comb in his hair, and another one where a police officer got involved because a student was chewing gum. That's a really, really dangerous, authoritarian, punitive approach to education that we should be concerned about. And from those, from those interactions, quite quickly becomes a criminal issue and we can see how it can spiral into the criminalisation of young people and puts people at risk of involvement in the penal system.

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So, no, I mean, I think it's very hard to make a positive case for the presence of police in schools.

And for schools that do have like a regular police presence, do you feel like it's possible to like de-stigmatise them once they have that kind of like rep in the community?

No, I don't think that is easily done. Again, this is something that a lot of parents said in the survey that we conducted, that...schools that have a school-based police officer have a negative perception in the communities because people think, "That school has a police officer – there must be a reason that that school has a police officer", and then they look at the student demographics and see that it's a majority...majority students of colour school, a working-class school. So, it's already threatened by the stigmatisations that come with race and class. If you add a police officer in there, you imply that a school needs a police officer, and there's stigma amongst the surrounding communities, but, perhaps even more worryingly, young people themselves, students, can become aware of that stigma, and it can create a kind of culture of low expectations in schools – you know, young people become aware that the school and the teachers don't expect much of them or expect criminality from them, and there's a risk that that can play out. I say "a risk" because it's not always the case that, you know, negative expectations lead to self-fulfilling prophecies, but it's creating the risk of that happening.

Yeah, absolutely. And, lastly, I think, you know, the most important question maybe regarding this topic is: while police are present in schools, and that increases, how do we support and kind of protect young people in their interactions with police?

Yeah. I think it's important that we make sure more and more people are thinking critically about the role of the police, seeing the police as an institution that maintains unequal power relations, and that quite often can't be trusted, has a long history of causing harm and murder, and we have to be attentive to those dangers. So, whether that is observing police interactions, as a bystander, if we're able, or making sure more and more young people are aware of their rights when facing police encounters – all of that is important, and, you know, there's a lot of mobilisation at the moment to make that happen, particularly led by Sisters Uncut and the cop-watch work that they're doing.

And we...I think we all should be campaigning as much as possible to move away from policing as a solution to social problems, and put forward more community-focused alternatives, and, you know, that takes us into conversations about de-funding and abolition, and I think we should take those conversations really seriously.

Thinking about just social research related to education more generally, like I wanted to ask you what do you think are some of the major challenges that like race-related educational research faces today?

There [has been] an awful lot of scrutiny on researchers who focus on race or those that work from an anti-racist perspective, so that's something that we need to be aware of. There's also going to be constraints on funding for more radical or more critical work. So, the window of opportunity seems to be narrowing in that sense.

On the other hand, the community-mobilising, awareness, the awareness that led so many people out in 2020 for the Black Lives Matter mobilisations, means that there's also an appetite out there for people to learn more about how race impacts upon society and impacts upon education.

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So, if we look at those in power, we can see real constraints on what we do, but if we're looking at the power within effective communities, we can see opportunity. And I think one of the challenges for us is how...how we build connections with those groups, how we make sure our work is embedded in the interests and needs of social movements, of communities of resistance, and how we...take the responsibilities that come with being a researcher seriously – and, you know, here, I'm not talking about kind of bureaucratic university ethics processes but about ethics as they develop in anti-racist communities. And I think that comes from maintaining and building...building connections.

On our project, we kind of talk about how there are certain elements of research that are quite colonial and they have that kind of nature. In what ways do you feel like research in higher education is kind of like a colonial practice?

I think research is often...is often incredibly detached from the people that it talks about, so it "speaks for" rather than "speaks with", and it is often incredibly unaccountable to those that are affected by the issues that are being researched. So, I think both of those, the lack of accountability and "speaking for", are reminiscent of colonial practices.

And research is often incredibly extractive. It's... Individual researchers- and, you know, we're all implicated in this, I'm implicated in this – individual researchers' careers are built off the research that they do, that, invariably, they...we benefit a lot more than those that we research.

So, there's a whole range of unequal...inequalities in research processes that have echoes or really clear parallels with colonial relations. You know, even think about how universities lock out...a lot of communities are locked out of universities, and, again, that's along...along race and class lines, particularly class lines, and that locking-out is not just in terms of access to campuses but access to research, you know, access to articles, journal pay-walls, and all that. And I think we have to ask ourselves, if our work only exists behind journal pay-walls, it can't be seen or is even incomprehensible to the people we claim to be working for, we really need to question our research practices. And I'm not saying we shouldn't ever write in academic language or for academic audiences, but we really need to have a commitment to being able to speak to those who are affected in comprehensible language that doesn't exclude.

Yeah, absolutely. Thank you so much. And, for my last question, what is something you'd like to see happen or see develop within higher education in the next 10 years?

The abolition of fees. I'd like to see universities, or significant groups within universities, be really explicitly committed to the pursuit of social justice, so really bringing the...knowledge, but perhaps more importantly, the time and resources that they have, to bear on the social issues that we're facing. We should be looking to challenge borders on campuses. There's an awful lot! There's an awful lot we need to do because there's an awful lot wrong with our universities, but I just hope that, as I said earlier, as we make the case for the transformation of curricula, we're also thinking about the more material issues of student fees and...and, you know, the kind of border-checks, the impact of a hostile environment on campus - bringing all of those issues together is what I would love to see.

But I should say that there are some amazing student groups at Manchester where I work. There's the Decolonise UOM group, there's Cops off Campus, there's been the amazing rent strikes at the University – students really holding the University to account, and in doing so, I think, building a sense of community and probably learning far more than they would do in any classroom. So, there is hope there. I think we just need to always push to the more radical, structural and material issues.

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Yeah. Thank you so much. I just want to thank you for sharing your thoughts and your ideas with us today. I'm really pleased that we got to have this conversation, especially because we don't really get to talk about like policing in schools, so to have it to be discussed with you and your work in-depth, as well as like unpacking just the tensions in doing educational research in general, like I really appreciate it. And, yeah, it's just been nice getting to know you a bit more and, yeah, thank you for just like inspiring our project through your work.

Thank you very much. Thank you for having me.

To find out more information, access our tools, or get in touch, visit us at blog.westminster.ac.uk/psj

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