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Podcast transcript:

Kyra: Hi everyone, welcome back to the podcast. For this episode, we are in conversation with Westminster PhD student and educator, Nayyar Hussain. We discuss growing up in Kilburn and navigating higher education as a working-class woman of colour. Nayyar also talks about her journey into doing her PhD straight after her bachelors in Sociology, before sharing the scope of her research on gentrification, urban regeneration and the effects on working class views. So, I like to start things off with getting to know our guests a little bit better, in their own words, so where did you grow up and where are you currently?

Nayyar: I grew up in South Kilburn in North West London, which kind of doesn't really exist anymore, which is what my work is all about, which I'll probably talk about later, but, yeah, I grew up in an estate in North West London called South Kilburn, and I'm still there now – I've literally lived there my whole life. But a lot of the time, I feel like, mentally, I'm in and out, like I'm like...I'm in South Kilburn but like just I'm like...I'm in London, and then my mental map of like where I'm at during the day is very much West London all the time. So, yeah, that's where I'm at right now, just like...where I live...uni...work, back home...yeah...

Kyra: How would you describe your upbringing in terms of how race was kind of seen and felt in your household?

Nayyar: Oh. I mean, it was always present, like... I think, as well, what is so interesting for me as well is that when I look back on when I was really, really young, like really young, like my earliest memories, I feel like I was always conscious of the fact that I was a Pakistani girl, like it was so obvious to me at such a young age and I feel like... I'm not too sure if that's the same for people who are not minoritized and em... Like even when I was young, like I went to a school where there wasn't that much...I think ethnic minorities were under-represented. There really wasn't a lot of ethnic minority groups within my school. So, even being in that environment as a young person, em...as well, like when I was raised, my parents, they didn't have the languages...or I guess not the languages, but the...the way to communicate what this...this is or what this means or... So, it's like, when I was young, it was so apparent to me, but I didn't know how to explain it, didn't have words, like I just was kind of like...yeah, it was like...it had no name, this thing that I felt, but em...it was just conscious... it was apparent every single day, and I think, immediately, when I was younger, what I would associate it to is how I look, so like my appearance, and how it was different to the people I



was around every single day of my life. And then, as I was like...I guess as I... And also part of it as well, I mean, was...I don't know how...even now, like thinking about how confusing it was at that age, I can't put a word on how I felt. It was just like...I was very conscious of how I looked. So, my parents, I felt like I stood out. And then, for me as well, like, em, as young person, I think...like I guess beauty standards, I think, from very, very, very young, like I thought...I'm not going to lie, I used to have a lot of self-hate, and I think those are my most striking memories of how I remember like how race was important as part of my upbringing, from my experiences in the outside world.

With my close family and stuff like there wasn't really any of that. I think when I used to get back home or around this particular area or with my family, em, those issues were just like not part of my thought process and....yeah, I just think that my spaces, in terms of like my family and home spaces, were very, very different and everything was okay.

In terms of how race played a role in my upbringing, I think, in hindsight again, when you're much younger or when you're just going through it, you don't always – I never had like words to explain anything, only until I got to university, but in hindsight, it played a role in the kind of resources that my family had. I think I'm first generation because I'm first...like my siblings in my family to be born in the UK and go to study in the UK, but, yeah, as like a first generation part of my...like member of my family, like in the UK, like I think it's very apparent that like race played a role in our upbringing because we weren't the most privileged. Like when I was four years old, I moved to the South Kilburn estate because our families just didn't have the resources to stay in a house and em...there was a lot of issues with employment and economic resources. So, at the time, I used to see it as just, you know, not being...not having a lot of money, but when I got older, especially when I went to university, I realised that it was part of a much bigger cycle of disadvantage that racialised groups face, particularly in the UK, because of...because of structural inequality, because of lots of inequality towards those particular groups. So, yeah, it shaped my whole life really, if I think about it that way. Immediately, as a young person, consciously, I was so conscious of the fact that I was a Pakistani girl, at such a young age, and I used to think about it every single day, em, in all my interactions, and then also, on top of that, if I think about my life, especially at an early age and in my household, race played such a big role in my life experiences, my opportunities, the resources that we had as a family.

I think, now, when I think about race, of course it still impacts me. I also think about things like my name. I'm always conscious, if I'm applying for stuff, like, you know, there's a lot of focus, especially nowadays with things like, you know, moving more towards a more equal society and unlearning or moving away from those kinds of prejudices and stuff, but I'm still conscious of how my race...how it impacts how I'm received by other people, how it maybe has an impact on my opportunities in life, you know, even my name on an application, if that



means it still has an impact on me. So, I think, now, it's...now, that's still a very significant part of my life.

But what I will say as well is, after going to the University of Westminster, after doing Sociology, which is – I sound like I'm selling this degree, which I'm really not trying to do – I feel like it was very empowering. A lot of the experiences that I had where race was quite obvious to me and race played a big role in my life, although I'm still living through those experiences, like many people, I feel, at this moment in my life, and for a very long time, I'm able to embrace this idea of race and I've been able to do meaningful things, and for that reason, how race plays out in my life or kind of how it's been in my life has now been quite a...very, very positive thing. And I don't mean to say like it's not been a positive thing but I think, from...from previously, my experience has led me to believe that some of these aspects of who I am or where I kind of I guess come from or, you know, my family background, were negative, they led to negative experiences in my life, but now it feels like such a positive thing and I've been able to use my position not to like understand other people because of course my position in life is so unique, even if I am part of a minoritized group, like able to...just have some insight and do meaningful things.

Kyra: I resonate so much in terms of like feeling like there's almost this kind of weight on your chest or like there's just always something going on but then not having the words to kind of like...yeah, like articulate what you mean or what you're feeling, and I think...I'm the same in terms of, you know, as soon as I started to kind of learn about sociology, like I learnt that, yeah, like my experience is definitely...unique to me, like my identity is unique, but the things that I'm feeling and what I'm experiencing are things that other people have experienced from, you know, in terms of my specific racial group or me being a woman, a woman of colour. So, yeah, I think coming into...an age where you kind of do understand how you can articulate these things and what they mean and giving a name to certain things, I think it's so empowering, like you've said...

Nayyar: Yeah.

Kyra: And, yeah, like I think it definitely changes...even the way I look at my childhood now, like I'll even just – I'll maybe read something and then I'll be like, wow, like this is something that I felt in my own childhood and it's almost just like always that eye-opening kind of experience that...I feel like you go through, like...

Nayyar: Yeah.



Kyra: ...until...like your entire life. I think it's always just kind of like these "ah" moments...

Nayyar: Yeah, definitely. I feel like, as well, with... I feel like there's a lot of guilt and shame. That's part of my experiences. Like so much of that...and em...taking a step back and looking at my childhood now, you realise that like...the way you learned stuff in education, the way your interactions happen, you realise that a lot of it is shaped around ideas of race and how important it is to be conscious – that those environments and people and structures are so conscious of how they may reproduce things, even if it's not explicitly what would be considered racist, but how environments can reproduce hostilities towards particular groups. And so like, if I think about the things that I learnt at school or...and whilst...it's so... it's so like a double-edged sword because I'm so grateful for having opportunities because I know how difficult it can be and I never want – I never want to say that and say like, oh well, we should all be all really flipping grateful about everything, but, you know, I do feel grateful because I know how different life can be, especially like first generation, and just my parents like constantly telling me how they used to walk like two hours to school and like how it's... You know, I feel grateful for the fact that I have a bit more provision in that sense, but just also recognising that race was such a big part of like...so what's taught at school or like your interactions that you have and like...yeah, just having a lot of fear and shame and guilt all the time, and also just like, especially after university, especially after university, feeling also very, very grateful for the people that have worked really, really hard to make spaces for racialised groups and minoritized groups to actually be able to resist some of these...kind of...I guess injustices because I know it's such a hard thing to do. So, it's just like...I kind of marvel at it all the time and think to myself like...we must all, to some extent, anyone who's minoritized, have felt this level of shame and guilt and I...to be able to, at one point, just say like no, like this...this is kind of like...to actually resist against it is such a hard thing to do and I feel so grateful as well to be able to be in an environment where so many people have done so...such hard work to get us to a space that even like reading something about someone resisting these environments can help you so much as an individual and actually empower you in a space where you don't always feel welcome or your experiences have led you to a lot of fear and shame and guilt. So, just feeling so grateful and just also really motivated to continue that if possible, and also feeling so like empowered, the fact that I'm part of a big community of...of minoritized people who have contributed to things that we really celebrate nowadays, like democracy and what it means to enjoy equality, because I think that... Sometimes, the hard work of like...feeling equality or embracing democracy, we kind of lose where all of that stuff came from, and oftentimes it comes from the hard work of [local] people who are minoritized to push against the injustices and make life easier and fairer and more inclusive. So, yeah, just like that's all my thoughts and feelings. It's quite emotional sometimes when I think about it actually!



Kyra: No, honestly, it is. And I was also going to say like, you know, you speak of being really grateful to the people who kind of made space before us and, you know, opened...helped you kind of get to certain opportunities, and I was going to say like, even thinking back to when I was doing my undergrad and like you would teach me, like it was also...like that representation was important to me in the sense of like, you know, you're a woman of colour, you're a PhD student, and you're still kind of like teaching like a class full of like, you know, 20 to 25 students, like that representation is important, you know, like I think being around strong women of colour in an institution that is like predominantly white, just thinking about the university in general, not necessarily Westminster, but, yeah, like I think it's really important and I think, you know, you need to show appreciation where it's due. So, yeah, I just want to say that you're definitely included in that group for me.

Nayyar: Oh, that means so much! That literally has made my year already! Like that means so much! Because sometimes you forget that...because, again, like you know when you're working or doing your studies, it's loaded with so much hard work you start forgetting how meaningful the small – not, it's not small, it's actually really big, like I've spent...I've spent quite a bit of time now, thankfully, like I'm really grateful that I've been teaching, but to be able to... Whenever I have moments where I see that students are like kind of happy, just at the very least, or...or doing well...and of course like, for me as well, like, you know, I'm always for minoritized groups, like for me to notice that someone's just doing really well, like it means so much, so it's...you know, you're part of that. I think we're all connected in that way. Even for me to...I feel privileged enough that the University of Westminster in particular welcomes a lot of students who may have traditionally been under-served, so it's like...for me to be in an environment where that's possible, for me to be around students where we can make a difference and it's right there in front of us, like, you know, it's so important. So, you're...you and students now are just as much as us, as colleagues I guess – I think we're all in this together.

Kyra: So, sorry, just going back to I guess your kind of upbringing, what shows and books did you watch like growing up, and I guess what kind of representations were you exposed to?

Nayyar: Oh. This is interesting, actually [laughing]! When we were younger, we didn't have a lot of resources, so we kind of just had TV, which was good enough, I'm not going to lie, like that used to keep us entertained, the music channels, the...whatever, the kids' TV. I was really obsessed with Sailor Moon, anime. I used to watch a lot of it with my brothers, like [Dragon War Z], I used to watch...like all of these kind of like fantasy shows, cartoons. So, as a very young child, I used to really enjoy that. Of course, there are definitely racialised aspects to all of these cartoons, all of these forms of entertainment, but I think what I enjoyed I guess about the fantasy world is that anything could be true. That sounds really, really cheesy, but I feel like when...when you are in a position where – also, as well, as a



young child, I think another thing that I was conscious of was that I used to really have a love-hate relationship with where I lived. So, I would kind of...because growing up on an estate, like you see all these...you see representation of childhood yourself as like living in a garden, like having a garden, having a kind of, quote, unquote, “respectable house”, and, you know, seeing your own environment and thinking like, oh, I don’t necessarily have what other children have and stuff like that. So, I used to have like a really love-hate relationship with where I lived. But like cartoons and stuff I think helped me re-imagine the spaces that I lived in and it make it really enjoyable actually.

But, I think, as I got older, a lot of the movies, a lot of the people that I was around, em, not to blame anyone but, you know, a lot of it was like the beauty standards, em, the...and I think that was a big deal for me, you know, maybe part of my experience, my and my sister as well, my family, just like...a lot of the...the beauty standards that I would see as part of entertainment or a lot of representation I would see is, yeah, I don’t personally feel like, em, they were very welcoming – not welcoming...I don’t know what the word is...? I just feel like...it was very dominated by privileged groups, and I think it does take a toll on you after a while, and I think, where there were minoritized groups, it was quite trivial, and, yeah, like I guess...you could laugh at it and stuff, but it’s just like...yeah...

But then...but then I think, recently, I feel like there’s a little bit more effort to have entertainment, have books, have stories, have any of these aspects of entertainment and it has a lot more representation – I think I’ve noticed that a little bit more, I’ll be honest, compared to like when I was growing up anyway.

Kyra: Yeah.

Nayyar: But, yeah, like when I was growing up as well, like we used to rely heavily on the school library, have like kind of Disney...like it was very Western vibes [laughing], a lot of the stories I was reading. And don’t get me wrong, like I was enjoying them, like it was taking me to another place, but it was very much like a tale of Western lives, and that’s fine, but, em, there wasn’t really...there wasn’t, yeah, the representation for myself wasn’t really there.

And I guess as well like...my parents came from Kashmir, where their education is very, very different. We were part of a village as well so it was like...if there was any kind of storytelling that they could contribute, em, it was through word of mouth, so it wasn’t like I had a book or anything. And my school, I think, especially my primary school, I don’t think there was a conscious effort. My secondary school, definitely. Primary school, I don’t think there was a conscious effort to...to kind of...bring these forms of stories or bits of entertainment to



people that are...are more minoritized spaces, I would say. So, yeah, a lot of the stuff, the things I used to enjoy as a young child, I think they were big-time Western vibes [laughing]!

Kyra: So, when do you think you started to look through a kind of like critical lens, maybe looking at like specific systems and spaces and behaviour?

Nayyar: I think it first started... I think it was always there. I just didn't have words to express how I felt. So I just...the fear, the shame, the guilt, I'll keep it to the side, and sometimes I used to internalise a lot of those aspects, so I'd want to...I'd kind of want to pander to those interests a little bit myself, if I'm truly honest. I think...after a while as well, I think gender, class, all of those things, were part of that...my...you know, my experiences. So, I think, when I got to like, let's say, secondary school, I think I was definitely getting much more critical, especially in relation to what was explicitly apparent to me, was the gender aspect, em, just because there was a little bit of that in school and as my growing up experiences and seeing certain things, I think I started becoming more critical of gender relations, especially with my home experiences and stuff like that, so I became very critical. And then I think, over time, it started...linking it all together, and I've become very consciously aware that that was not just gender but it was also like a race thing, was a class thing, was an age thing, was everything kind of. So, I think, at secondary school, I kind of started more explicitly thinking about my critical thinking. Immediately, it felt like it was gender but it became more apparent that it was...you know, my experiences of gender inequality were vastly different to my peer who was a white woman or a white man. So, I kind of became more conscious of the fact that it was...you know, the fact that I was a Pakistani woman, from South Kilburn in an estate.

I think also, as well, what became apparent – yeah, I think, I don't know, it was just the...it was just the kind of like...the gendered aspects as well, of how people used to speak about people who live on estates, I think, as well, like those kinds of things enabled my critical thinking, I would say. But I think it was always there. It was just I was getting to the point where I had the languages...and also the frustration after a while, like, em, to kind of just feel like, oh my gosh, like this is actually really annoying, this is really...something's just not feeling right and not feeling okay to like...try to find solutions in myself to act a certain way so that I could fit in or...or accept what was going on, and after a while, just getting frustrated with the fact that I felt like it wasn't within me anymore to make those...and then just kind of, you know, going forward like that.

Kyra: So I guess...why Sociology for you? Did you study it at A Level or was it something that you first studied like upon coming into university?



Nayyar: It was actually something I studied at A Level. You know what was crazy, and I feel like...I feel bad for saying this because I feel like I'm going to end up exposing my school, my secondary school [laughing], but like, em...when I was younger, like many people, and like many people still are, I was kind of like obsessed with this idea of like...not being a psychiatrist but I just felt like, you know, understanding people's minds and all that, like, oh my gosh...like I kind of cringe at myself now, even though there's nothing wrong with that, like there's nothing wrong with that, but I obviously had a very simplistic understanding of what that even meant, like to do something like Psychology. So, I kind of had like a 'True Crime' angle or like [laughing]...you know...those kind of really simple takes, I'd say. So, I... and then, when they kind of gave us A Level options, it said like...Sociology, the description of it was so, so small, and I always remember it because I was like, oh, like this is what this is about, like it was very ambiguous but it was very much drawing me in because I was still thinking in that 'True Crime' aspect, but it was like...it was something like: "This module will give you an insight into the theory..." blah-blah-blah, "...and what makes people tick," and I was like, huh, like does that mean I'm going to start unpacking people's brains, is that going to mean like I'm going to start understanding what goes into the mind of this person...? You know, all that entertainment stuff that, you know, is obviously very simple, a simplistic version of these different disciplines, so I was like, okay, yeah, sign me up! But obviously, I got there, I got there now and it was very different [laughing], but I was...I was very interested in what was being taught. I just felt like it came – I don't like this word, but I feel like it did come a little bit naturally to me. I don't know what it was, but I just felt like I resonated with some of the stuff that I was being taught.

But, personally, I don't think I had the best experiences until, in education, until I got to university. So, it was just like...it kind of was enjoyable, but, at the same time, as a whole, I just wasn't enjoying school, and it was kind of one of those things where I was getting that pressure – I felt that pressure from my parents to do really well in school, when I really wasn't doing well at all [half-laughing], so I kind of was seeing it as something to see myself through. But then, when the pressure now to go to university came, I just thought like what am I even going to do?! And then, for me, I just think that I had enjoyed Sociology, I'd also done really well in it – I mean, I don't think I did very well in it, but I did better than all my other A Levels. Oh my gosh, I don't even know how I ended up in university, but now I'm... now I've moved away from feeling shame about my A Levels and I really...I just know now that a lot of my experiences were wound up with, em, just...being under-served in some ways, and not necessarily like...you know, and also different ways of learning and different forms of knowledge. So, it's like...it's not particularly that you get the bad grade and then that's like you're not smart because, when I was young, I used to really think I was really... you know, this horrible idea of being actually stupid, em, and it's not really...it's not anything to do with that. It's like different people have different ways of expressing themselves and different knowledges, and all of that does not get honoured in the education system, because em...you know...and, you know, then there's that aspect of being under-served. So, I



just feel like there's a lot actually there. So, I've come to terms with my A Levels [laughing], let's put it that way!

But yeah, like, em, then I went to Sociology, but I was really interested because I saw some of the modules that were being taught, em, that were being taught at Westminster as part of Sociology, and I was very interested in them, em, and so I signed up and, immediately, when I... I just had – when I got to university, I just had such a good feeling. Like the way... the way that they welcome everyone, the way that the space was to learn, it was so vastly different to any experience I've ever had in education, and I felt like some of those hierarchical ways of being had just completely shattered, and it was so refreshing. But, again, at that time, I didn't have the way to express it. I just felt a little bit more free, I'd say. I felt like there was more trust in me, I guess. So, yeah, and the classes were just so interesting, and it just kind of...was such a nice, refreshing feeling, and like, yeah, like after a while of... you know, I had some good times in school, but after a while of just thinking like, oh, I'm just kind of [riding/writing] this, this thing I have to do, parent pressure, peer pressure, I kind of felt like I kind of fitted in a little bit. And, then, of course, like...yeah, like just the learning that took place, the interesting topics, just confirmed to me that this was definitely actually something I was really interested in, something that I will want...I just want to continue doing, like I was just so excited to do the other modules, I was excited to see what happened at, you know, the different levels, and I was excited to even like do some of the criminology modules like... And I was so excited as well to just be part of it and also meet more members of the staff. Like I was really getting into it I think, em, yeah, I think... I think, initially, why I chose Sociology was that it did interest me for those...for some questionable reasons, em, but after doing it for a while, it confirmed that I actually really was interested in this aspect and it took me to a good place, I would say.

Kyra: Yeah, I know, for sure, and I can completely like relate to you, like I think, yeah, like it's a process of definitely trying to kind of lose the shame in, you know, getting certain grades and everything that kind of happens before you actually get into university, but I think, yeah, like I just remember doing my A Levels – I don't think I've ever studied for something so much in my life! Like I used to...like I don't know why, like I really...even reflecting now on my bachelors, like I honestly feel like A Levels were so much more difficult for me.

Nayyar: Yeah! It really was! It was very stressful, so stressful!

Kyra: Yeah.

Nayyar: And it's like I think that there's better ways of doing things...



Kyra: Absolutely, yeah. It just felt like a big memory test, like all of my exams really. And I think...another thing that I like so much about Sociology at Westminster was that most of the...the ways, the forms of assessment were like assignments, written assignments, and obviously like you would have presentations and things like that, and that was just obviously something that I wasn't used to coming from doing A Levels that are just all written exams and things like that.

Nayyar: Yeah.

Kyra: So, I think was definitely...yeah, like I definitely resonate with, you know, there are different ways that people learn, and I think it's important to kind of appreciate those ways at a young age because imagine how many people are kind of like really enjoying Sociology but they're just not that great at exams but they really would have thrived in university but, you know...

Nayyar: Oh yeah. I think it's so limiting. I definitely, like you said – I think that was really good that you said that. I do see the value in the education system, 100%, it has opportunity to change your life, and, for a lot of people, it's much – for many people, it's much needed. It's like one of – how I thought, as a young age, one of my old ways to actually do some sort of class mobility or just get myself out of the situation that I felt I was in. But, at the same time, I just think there's better ways of doing things and it's so limiting to constrict people to things like very particular exams and one way of writing or expressing yourself or sharing knowledge, and it's like...there's so many people that have such an amazing insight and such a different way, and to honour that, I think, makes for a much better learning environment than to...kind of set the precedent that like, if you can't do this test, then you're going to go into a foundation or lower, or if you're going to...you're going into higher. Like those things can be really harmful, I think, and just feed into negative experiences, and especially for all forms of minoritized people, all...like I just think it's wrong. And I think, as well, it's so unsustainable because it's like... People will...people will thrive and be happy if they are welcome, and that's including in education environments, and I just think sometimes about some of the choices – I mean, it might be much different now because I went to school a long time ago, but it's like do you want people to be miserable and have serious self-doubt and be upset with themselves or do you want to, you know, encourage people into this space and feel enlightened and feel inspired and feel happy, and I feel like, you know, if you want people to feel happy, you can't just stick to one way of doing things and make people feel like they're just really worthless if they don't make it, and I think there's a lot of better ways to do it, basically. But it was really stressful at A Levels – that was so stressful. Like I remember constantly the teaching team saying like this is the biggest jump ever and, you know...



Yeah.

Nayyar: And, yeah, it kind of was a big jump, but it's just like whose fault is that, mine or... mine or the curriculum because why are we jumping like this, like is it even necessary? Because it doesn't make sense when I look back – I got a first for my undergraduate, but I did so bad at A Levels, and, technically, is university not supposed to be harder or...? I'm confused, like it just didn't make any sense to me.

Kyra: Yeah, no, absolutely, like...I feel like, by the time I finished my A Levels, like I was so burnt out like I was like even thinking like am I even ready for university if it really is going to be like this extremely difficult jump like...

Nayyar: Oh...

Kyra: And imagine how many people have just like, yeah, I'm not going to university, because of that same kind of fear and that same self-doubt that they develop whilst doing their A Levels. But em...

Nayyar: Oh yeah, that's very real for a little of people. It's so understandable. But it's also deeply upsetting, like when I think about things like that because it's like...you know, there's people that even come to education with that...with that feeling, and you can really tell how it impacts somebody, em, without speaking like too deeply, but of course like as a...someone who's been lecturing for a while, I have seen it in other people before, and it does upset me because it's like...I kind of understand a little bit as well how that must feel, but also, on top of it as well, when I do get talking with students and I just hear the things they have to say, and I'm just like...you know how amazing you are – and that sounds cheesy, but like you have so much interesting things to say, you are such a unique person, with such unique ways of expressing yourselves, and a unique position to bring to this world, and it's like...I just feel upset that someone could ever be put in a position where they feel like they're just not good enough.

[Music]



Kyra: So, you didn't exactly take a traditional...or should I say like the most common route into kind of like doing a PhD, you know, where you do your bachelor's and then your master's. What encouraged you to begin a PhD just straight after your bachelor's? I feel like it's such a big decision to make at 21, 22...

Nayyar: Oh yeah [laughing].

Kyra: Yeah, like what steps did you take?

Nayyar: I mean, to be honest – and I think everyone can resonate with this when they leave university, em, and only now, after stepping away, can I talk about it peacefully because, at the time, I was so stressed. I was like, when you leave university, you have that feeling like, yeah, I went to university... I felt like I got sold a dream because I was thinking I'm going to leave uni and I'm going to have like a really good job and I'm going to be living this really exciting life as a young person in London and, you know, whatever the case may be, but it just was really not the case. Like I did my bachelor's and I really enjoyed the whole time and I felt the most confident I'd ever felt in my whole entire life and I felt like I just...felt like I just had grown so much, and I also had such good connections with the staff at the school, and I don't think I was really ever truly ready to let go of it all. It kind of felt like it was...yeah, it was...and then I went off and I just carried on working in retail and, after a while, kind of got a little bit scary and I was like, okay, I need to get a job, so I was applying for jobs, em, and I think, at first, I just wanted to make the most money as possible, so I was applying for these really boring jobs like HR – and no offence to anyone who's doing HR [laughing], but, for me, it was personally like...when I think back to it, I was like, no, if I ever actually got that job, like I don't know if I'd actually be very, very happy because I don't think it's what I want to do. But I was just applying for any like job that was kind of showing up as related to Sociology, but I wasn't getting a job, like I was really not getting a job. Some of these jobs as well, they had like these maths tests, and I was thinking like this is it, like I'm going to work in retail forever, and that's fine if retail was a really supportive space that paid properly, but it wasn't – awful. So, yeah, I just got really scared. I was carrying on applying for jobs though and, yeah, I just carried on and carried on and carried on. And because I had a good relationship with colleagues at Westminster, it was, em, David, David, eh, yeah, David from Sociology, em, he just...he just emailed me and he said, "Nayyar, they're putting out...scholarships basically to do a PhD in Social Sciences, and we think, you know, you did a really...you did a really good undergrad research, like maybe would you consider something like this?" And I was just like thinking like...I don't know how this is even possible, like I was thinking I haven't got a master's to do this [half-laughing], I don't know if I want to get myself in more debt, like what does this even mean?! And he just said like it's going to help you with applying for stuff – you have nothing to lose, and I was like, yeah, that's true, em, even if it's an experience, then I'll just do it, and I loved what I researched about so I thought let me just



do it. So, I spent a bit of time...I spoke with everyone, sent my proposal, and, em, yeah, like... that...that happened, and then, after a while, I heard back. I hadn't got the scholarship, but, em, they...I got contacted saying basically the Social Sciences team wanted to speak with me about, em, my research. So, I was kind of confused as to what that meant, but I was like, yeah, let's go with it because what else am I really doing anyway [laughing]?! And I was just not ready to let go of my research. So, yeah, I met with Val and we met in the café, and I was just so nervous because I just didn't know what any of this really meant and where I was going with it, yeah, and Val just spoke to me, asked me about my research, and em...yeah, after that, they just said that like if you can...if you can basically – it was kind of, ultimately, if I could fund myself, come and do a PhD, like... So, I was so grateful that that was case, and I just felt, as well, relieved that they believed in me enough to do something like that because I was like what...?! But it felt right. And then it just was like a rush to basically find funding, convince, I guess, the more admin departments at Westminster that I would be okay to sustain myself and do this. And then it...after...and this is a very simplified version of the story because it was a lot more complex than this, em, a lot more...a lot more involved in it, but I think, yeah, ultimately, that's what happened.

And then, I just started, and, yeah, it was kind of like...at quite a young age. If I think about it, I think about it, it's kind of crazy, but I think I just went with it. It was one of those things. I personally wouldn't recommend anyone just go for anything because, of course, you want to be more thoughtful with the things that you do or how it's going to impact you and stuff, but, honestly, at the time, it felt like the only option to have something going and em...also to just start enjoying my days as well because working in retail was just like...and em.... I had to still work at retail, but just knowing that I had this...thing that I really enjoyed going for me, like it meant something, it meant a lot. So, yeah, that's what happened, and I started.

Kyra: And what exactly is your PhD research question at the moment? And I guess could you explain like how it expands on your undergraduate dissertation?

Nayyar: Okay. Yeah, sure. So, basically, undergraduate, I...I did my research basically on the impact of gentrification for young people who grow up on estates where their estate is basically being gentrified. So, I think, initially, I just thought about how I grew up, I just thought about being on a construction site, literally, for my whole life, and along with everyone else I grew up with, and just thinking like...I wonder what that is...what it means to people and how it positions them and how it impacts their lives. Because I know, for me, it did impact my life, physically, emotionally, and especially the fact that where my estate sits is on the border of very other like affluent boroughs, and it's very obvious that we are an estate in...like a little...a little estate in the middle of...right across the road actually from like houses that are like millions of pounds. And like, for me, at a young age, I used to... sometimes kind of find it inspiring, which is so cheesy to say, but I used to think like, you



know, I need to leave the estate, like I need to be [heard] [laughing] and I need to...I need to go and make it, and like it was reminding almost every single day. But, at the same time, I don't think it was always good either. So, yeah, I wanted to just like do research on that, how does it impact young people, how does it go and impact their lives, how does it make them feel unstable or stable, their sense of belonging, all that stuff. So, I did a bit of that at, em, undergraduate, and I just extended it into my PhD. So, now, it's a much bigger project on basically the lived experiences of young people in gentrified estates or estates that are being gentrified and what it means to grow up and live through processes of gentrification of a place that you call home. And I think, yeah, I think that's basically what my research question is, although I am considering adapting it slightly, but the main gist of it is that I am looking at a very particular estate, a very particular minoritized group of young people who have grown up in these particular conditions, but it resonates with a lot of people's stories in the UK because a lot of estates are facing the same thing. Of course, everyone's story is going to be entirely unique, but these things have such a huge impact on the lived experiences of a whole group of people and they are under-represented in literature or even policy and it's like there's...you have a responsibility, you know, to honour their voices because they are being [empowered and it affects literally] their whole lives.

So, em, that's what my research is about, but the more and more I've done it, and the bigger it is now, there's a lot of different aspects to it as well. So, it's like there's the main focus, to prioritise the voices of people who are minoritized and to bring their really, really important knowledge because it's coming from a position of like standpoint theory, and I feel so confident to talk about it now because of Jennifer's lecture [laughing], but from standpoint theory because those groups are better positioned to talk about what those urban changes mean, really and truly, on the ground. But also, yeah, to prioritise their voices, to prioritise that, but also like...thinking about how we do social research anyway, and part of my PhD is also about using research methods and approaches that are under-privileged, so moving away from like some forms of quantitative data, moving away from surveys and just interviews, and looking at other ways of collecting information, and how that means that you can honour knowledge from minoritized groups because not everyone can sit and tell you a story through an interview. Oftentimes, it's actually quite hard to touch on really intimate aspects of your life. But things like reflection, personal experiences, storytelling, em, you know, biographies, stuff like that, like I think are...part of my research because I think it starts to bring those under-privileged forms of knowledge to the fore, but also like things like social media is part of my research, visual, em, aspects are part of my research, just doing things slightly differently that means that we can embrace the ways that people share knowledge in a different way and also embrace the way that young people live as well. And, hopefully, now, I've also had another idea to turn my PhD, eventually, hopefully – let's get there and then...but into a graphic novel so that when it is accessible to everybody, it's truly...not truly but like...you know, it's more accessible in terms of it's a graphic novel. The way I wish for it to be written as well, I wish for it to be much more simplified and accessible so that it's not just people that have gone to university that can access this but people from



different backgrounds can engage with it as well. So, it's like...my research is about the minoritized places but also challenging knowledge production and also making this more accessible, I'd say, as well.

Kyra: Yeah. No, that's so inspiring, like I think...for you to kind of also feel like you want this to be accessible to, you know, people like us and, you know, what can you do further with your research to kind of like, yeah, make it available to the masses I think is definitely...yeah, like it's inspiring! What advice would you kind of give to prospective PhD students?

Nayyar: Oh! Basically, what I would say – and, actually, I was doing quite a lot of workshops, not quite a lot of workshops, a few workshops on this, for people who are thinking of doing a PhD, so if anyone's listening and they want to do a PhD at Westminster, they have a few workshops that they do that, you know, you don't have to even have applied but if you're just thinking of doing a PhD, you can come along and there'll be a student that gives you like advice.

But the biggest advice I would give, first and foremost, so cheesy, but just to believe in yourself, and just like, em, coming from my particular background, I just know those strong feelings of shame and fear and guilt and all those things, and self-doubt and imposter syndrome and...just all of those at once, to just try your best to see past it. And Val actually said to this to me, and I always hijack the saying now, because it resonates so much, but Val honestly once said to me, was like, you know, you are unique – and I'm saying this not about myself but to everyone else – my advice is that you are totally unique. You have a completely unique lived experience, a unique way of seeing things, a very, very unique and interesting and important contribution to make, and people are going to want to talk to you and know you and hear what you have to say for that reason alone, and so, just to feel empowered by that. And, oftentimes, as well, yeah, like the best conversations I've ever had is with people who are at that crucial stage where they're figuring out what they want to do. They have so much to contribute, so much to give, and like just to feel empowered within that as well.

And I think another bit of advice is to seek help. So, a lot of like the hidden knowledge, I guess the hidden curriculum is what we used to call it, especially in A Level, but, em, hidden like...a lot of people who are very much more well resourced backgrounds, I'd say, or privileged backgrounds, I feel they feel more comfortable in spaces to ask for help, and that's part of the hidden curriculum because you can actually get a lot of help to do a PhD proposal and a PhD application. So, I know, at undergraduate or like A Level, there's kind of like...you feel alone with your UCAS application, and you feel like you kind of have to know [...] or you ask your sibling or something like that, but you don't have to be alone at all, like there are staff at Westminster – at Westminster, at any university. You can actually contact



them, ask them, especially if they specialise in your area that you want to do a PhD about, contact them, ask them for advice, don't worry about bothering people. You know, this actually helps the university as well, so of course they're going to help you. So, it's like you... you can ask for advice and help, as much as possible, so try your best [not] to reach out. And of course like I recognise as well that universities need to do more to welcome people and go to those people rather than us having to constantly individualise the issue and be like, yeah, I've got to do this [...], yeah, because it's not always that easy. But just [knowing you can ask] for as much help as possible and there's literally like...they can help you with applications, your proposal, giving you suggestions, talk to you, em, they can give you a lot of help, and, also, to kind of, I guess, be a bit firm, Especially for my students who are from, I would say, minoritized group, a lot of the times maybe, or sometimes, you have ideas that... are just so unique and are, you know, like innovative and super-creative and you have...of course, you're very, very unique so you're going to have a unique contribution. So, if you feel as though like...that the supervisors or people are not getting your point, don't feel like it's like a rubbish point. It's just amazing, honestly, and they just don't get it [laughing]! Some people just don't get it. But, most of the time, a lot of universities will support you and do this with you because they're learning through you as well. So, yeah, just, em, I guess give yourself...ask for help.

And also, as well, not to sound like a super like...I don't know...what's the word...work, work, work oriented person, but there's a degree of hard work that's going to have to go into it, so just to prepare yourself that you're going to have to do a lot of hard work, which is so tough sometimes when you just want to live a soft life and you just want to just calm down and you just don't want to deal with it [at the] time, but you do have to do a lot of hard work and just to prepare yourself for that.

And, also, to maybe see it as a source of positivity that you can set yourself goals and achieve them, so it just turns out to empower you, ultimately. So, yeah, that's my advice.

I would also, probably, the final thing I would say is, try your best not to feel like you have to live up to a particular way of being. So, as a...when I was doing my PhD, I just thought that like I had to be, em, a professor-type vibe, like a very smart individual that speaks in a particular way, and, yeah, I think that's not true at all. And you don't have to be a particular type of way. You can, honestly – it's not easy always but...to...probably to say this, but to just be yourself, like you are [good enough], and don't let anyone make you feel unwelcome or make you feel like you have to be a type of way or you have to, you know, act a certain way – like you just don't have to be like that. You don't have to give up your interests as well, like you still – the most important thing about this is you, and whatever means that you stay feeling like you. You don't have to give up your interests or who you are or like things that you do or your style, any of those things, to just do a PhD. Yeah...



Kyra: Yeah, you gave so much there, like yeah, definitely solid advice, like use those resources and, yeah, just be yourself and don't be afraid to make space.

Nayyar: Yeah, definitely, not at all, please don't.

Kyra: So, for this segment, I wanted to obviously get into your PhD topic a little bit more. I think, for a lot of young people, especially those who have grown up in London their whole lives, like particularly in kind of lower socioeconomic areas, inner city areas, you know, gentrification and urban regeneration are processes that we've either been, you know, directly affected by or we're constantly kind of in the presence of. I think my area is kind of in the process of being gentrified at the moment. But, yeah, I feel like the word "gentrification" itself is a term that definitely gets thrown around a lot, but maybe would you kind of like to share what gentrification kind of means for you and I guess how it differs to urban regeneration?

Nayyar: Well, I think gentrification, I mean, the first way [always coins] from Ruth [Glass], and I remember this because I remember, so long, spending ages trying to find what it means because what it means also changes and it's different depending on the UK context, the US context, global context, but, traditionally, it was mainly about spaces that have been occupied and are home to a particular community that end up changing, for whatever reason, either through...mainly because of urban policy. So, previously, like slum clearance, what was called slum clearance anyway, to, now, what we call as re-development or knocking down the blocks or whatever the case may be, and that meaning that groups are displaced, and in their place, more affluent communities start to live there and are able to spread their particular dynamics and lifestyles and aesthetics and that kind of thing. But the way I would see it is it's a form of like...I mean, it's always been perceived as a form of social injustice, and it's always kind of, to some degree, been tied to issues of racism, and that's how I see it personally. The way I see gentrification is it is...it's a way in which – oh, there's so much to it because there's aspects towards belonging and, you know, then there's consideration of intersections of like class and gender, but the way I see it is, particularly in the context of the UK, is spaces that have been home to minoritized communities, who have also done so much to contribute to life in these areas, done so much positive contributions to life in the UK, to things that we celebrate, like democracy, the things that we celebrate, like aspects of equality, who have done so much, who have created these beautiful spaces, I would say, for communities, especially communities that face a lot of inequality, who are basically exploited in a way. Their homes are removed in the name of...better quality of living, you know, in the name of actually eradicating some of the socioeconomic issues that they're facing, which is contradictory because the outcomes never really reflect that, but their homes are kind of destroyed and the spaces where they belong, or they...they've spent



a lot of time belonging or had opportunities to belong, are removed, and, as a result, as a consequence, those communities are displaced, either physically to another area or, at the very least, emotionally, because where they live no longer...it's no longer recognisable. And also, on top of it, we have the more affluent communities moving in, the more middle class kind of aesthetics, more affluent aesthetics, dynamics, demographics taking place. So, that's how I would perceive it, and I perceive it also as well as part of a long thread of inequality towards particular groups and it's just a continuation of that. So, even though it's not explicit, wouldn't be considered explicit like forms of like unequal urban policy towards minoritized groups, because the way it's framed now is very, very different, I still see the outcomes leading to a continuation of inequality for minoritized groups, class inequality, race inequality, namely, but also all different forms of inequality. So, I see it as a form of social injustice. And I also see it as a very conflicting form of social injustice, particularly with the way that it gets framed nowadays. Like, previously, urban regeneration wasn't called urban regeneration, there was other names for it, but it was kind of a similar concept, like, you know, it was kind of like before it was like slum clearance. You know, there's a community who are living in poor conditions, it's also like a health hazard – let's remove this space and make something better. But now, it's kind of like...there's a whole community that's living on these estates that have been neglected for so long by the government, you know, through forms of managed decline. Let's remove these estates. Let's make life for people who live on these estates better. Let's stop letting these groups of people being excluded. Let's make life better. But it's kind of like...the outcome of it is like, okay, you have presented people with a good quality of living which they deserve, but also like there's a lot of expense to that because rising house costs, displacement, emotionally or physically, so it's just like you kind of...it kind of reproduces spaces of exclusion actually, which is so contradictory to how it's framed. So, it's, yeah, it's a double-edged sword. People get presented with really harsh options. You have conditions which are not really truly liveable but people make the best of their situation, they deserve better housing, they deserve not to have their spaces neglected, which they have been, and then they get given the option to have this beautiful space, to have better quality of living, but then it ends up being something that's kind of impossible because it's just too expensive or they're not, you know, what we would call like permanent residents. You know, so many things go into it that end up meaning that so many people are like displaced or they just don't recognise their area anymore, they don't have that connection, [conviviality] is lost, community connection is lost. So, yeah, it's like a form of injustice, I'd say.

Kyra: And you said previously how, you know, you'd grown up in South Kilburn, you've lived there your whole life, but how it doesn't really look like South Kilburn anymore. Like how have these processes kind of impacted your own life?

Nayyar: Yeah, like...and, again, I think, every time I talk about this, it's so nuanced. So, it's like...for me, I do say a lot of times that there's some negative aspects, but it's very, very,



very complex because, for people, anyone who's grown up on an estate, they may have this experience where you kind of grow up kind of loving and hating where you live because you kind of love the way that you have the community connection, because that's also strong here, the community connections, especially in hard times – that means a lot for people. To some extent, you know, everyone's struggling or has different issues that they're facing, but the community connections make the place lively. Also, on top of it, the...South Kilburn used to actually be quite lively, like it was...everyone was out and about all the time, contrary to how it gets framed in the media, like just these horrible racialised terms like “no -go zones” and like “gang zones” or whatever they call this like... You know, of course there's issues like that here, rooted in disadvantage, but it was very lively, it was a very community aspect, but then, at the same time, you kind of really hate where you live. You're conscious of the stigma. You're conscious of the fact there's so many different types of labels attached to where you live. And then, also, your living conditions like are really, really bad, like that have a really big impact on your quality of life. So, it's like...

And, also, it wasn't always that nice, like the estate actually looked quite ugly [laughing]! Like it was home and it felt happy, like when I used to come home, like I used to really enjoy it, but when I think about it, it wasn't really that good looking, like it was kind of like...it was grey like... I was talking to my friend actually the other day because we were talking about my PhD and stuff and he was saying as well like it was kind of like living in the black and white ages, like it just felt like I was literally living in like monochrome because it was just monochrome everywhere I looked and it was a big shadowy estate so it was like, yeah...

But I still would say I called it home and so, now, you know, there's something quite, I don't know, significant about having the place you call home like literally physically removed right in front of your eyes, every single day for the last 12 years, and in such a violent manner as well, like demolishing the estate like with these big cranes, like there's something so significant about that, and then it just shows that the estate, and everything that was kind of meaningful here, is getting kind of washed away, as the rubble gets washed away and that kind of thing. And then like the aesthetics of the estate now are very similar to like a lot of new-builds but it just doesn't have the same open spaces, it doesn't have the same liveliness, and a lot of the people that, you know, who used to occupy these spaces are not really here, and, for that reason, it's unrecognisable and it has a different feeling, and it doesn't feel like...as familiar, I would say, and it feels like it's kind of set a tone.

Because the community connections that existed in the estate prior, there's definitely efforts for those to continue, and I think, the previous South Kilburn estate, there was a conscious effort to maintain community connection. So, if there are any community connections now, it's due to the fact that those existed long before the estate was – you know, it wasn't because of these new spaces, it's because it's continuing from the estate. But, even then, I



feel like there's such a more privatised tone to like the way...we live in the same area, like it's literally the exact same area, but like there's not that connection with everyone anymore. And like, for me, it used to feel like home. It used to feel kind of like a big playground, in a way, but now it feels like I live in a corporate environment, and like the time of the day, the rush at like 9am, like the kind of...it's just...it's given corporate, it's like...it's just so...business vibes, "I'm keeping to myself" vibes, and that's fine, I don't expect no one to talk to each other because, in the estate, no one was really doing all of that all the time anyway, but it's just not like that anymore. So, it's almost unrecognisable.

And, when I've been doing my research, for a lot of people, they feel that loss, they feel that their leisure spaces have gone, the opportunities to belong have also vanished, and it also compels people to, even though they can stay here, thank goodness, if they can afford it, they just feel like they just don't want really because it just doesn't feel the same. So, for that reason, whilst you feel like you live in a more what we'd call, in a quote, "respectful" form of housing, which everyone deserved, even in the previous estate, you also kind of...are like met with these, eh, dilemmas of like loss of community, harder to live here because it's just so unaffordable, and you just don't really recognise where you live anymore.

Kyra: Yeah. No. And I think, I mean, speaking from like my perspective of my area, like I live on...like my closest station is on the Elizabeth Line, and how that's kind of new, and obviously like people who live kind of in Greater London and outside of London, it's easier for them to get into Central, and I remember just like, when the line was fully built and it was working...like it was going from West to East, just straight through, I remember just thinking, oh my gosh, since when did like all of these rich white businessmen live in my area, like [when they're at] my station [laughing], and I'm like, oh my gosh, this is new, like this is different.

Nayyar: Yeah.

Kyra: Yeah, like and I think...I mean, we can joke about it, but I think, you know, deep down, like it really is like, yeah, I'm not able to kind of recognise my area, or my area no longer has like a specific kind of community, a specific kind of community feel, and I think, yeah, like it's...it's hard, it's like a hard pill to swallow really.

Nayyar: Yeah, definitely. Like those communities who live in those spaces, you know, it's not been an easy ride to even get to that estate – like the amount of discrimination that used to happen with housing allocation, you know, giving the crustiest houses to minority groups because that, you know, used to end up being how it was, like housing allocation was such



an unequal thing. So, it's like...to get to that space has not been easy. So, it's only, you know, it...I could totally understand why there's hostilities towards, you know, local councils, or apprehensions towards incomers, because it threatens the spaces that you've lived in for so long, that you know have been so hard to get to, and it threatens belonging and it threatens a space to call home. So, it's like, whilst we probably, you know, we don't necessarily...would look at someone else from a more affluent background and be like, you know, "You are the problem" because it's not necessarily as clear-cut as that, it can be unsettling to see that though because it does – it's not the individual, it just represents hostility, it represents the fact that things are changing, and also represents how precarious your situation is and the fact that that could just easily change. So...

And, yeah, and you just, as well, all that stuff, like, you know, when was this happening here like...or what...are we doing this now like...? You know, it's just a bit weird. Like I remember when I saw someone running, going for a morning run, at like 5am, with like full-on like high-tech running gear, and I was thinking...huh...? I was like...no...like when do people run at this time, like...am I in a posh area or something? I was like no [...]...like go for your like running and stuff, but I was like this is not South Kilburn...like if anyone's running, like there's...either they're messing around or there's some form of trouble, both of which is absolutely [fine]. But I was just like, what, for your morning run in South Kilburn...?

Kyra: Mm, yeah.

Nayyar: Or like when I see those like little fancy dogs, I'm just like that's sweet but it's like, em...that...that puppy is probably like living like the bestest lifestyle and like that puppy costs like...somebody's rent.

Kyra: Oh dear [laughing]. Or even like when you see like a Pret in your area and you're like... Pret...?!

Nayyar: Oh no. Yeah. Yeah, goodbye. I think I even saw...I think, okay, I think one's not as related but I saw it as related just because I started noticing things, [but I also...there's this kind of paranoid tone I think] for myself anyway but like on the road that's near me, I saw this shop and it was like home cinema installations, and I was thinking no way! Who in South Kilburn is going to install a home cinema?! Where? What room? What space? Like what the hell...?!

Kyra: Yeah, that's [very odd].



Nayyar: I'm thinking what the hell is going on?! I don't think it lasted long, but I was like, no way, there is no way. I was thinking go down [...] because this is not [...].

Kyra: Oh yeah. But it is like those little indicators like, you know, that show like, okay, this area is changing and like you almost feel like...what does that mean for me, like what's next, you know?

Nayyar: Yeah!

Kyra: And even just like looking at things...what's the word...like even seeing like stores close, like when they used to be kind of like family-owned businesses and things like that, it's just like so heart-breaking to see...

Nayyar: Yeah. Because that adds to the familiarity of the place, like it just like...it's so important. And then when you see those spaces get removed and it's like a big company or... it's just like, come on, like...yeah... Because it's also, as well, for me, I [don't like the fact that] like, em, in, em, like a lot of policy as well, it's like...it's all about like culture and this, this, that and the other, but it's just like...what culture...like the diluted version or are we talking about like embracing...and not having to dilute our differences to still be part of what you consider as culture? So, it's like, em, yeah, it's not nice to see.

It's also, as well, like...especially...I mean, less so now because more people, I guess, have moved out or moved away or been dispersed across the new estate in South Kilburn... When there was still like issues happening, which, for a lot of people who lived on South Kilburn, they would routinely witness, but I think people who live in this area, who've traditionally lived here for a while, have a different understanding of issues of crime. Like of course we're all upset with it, we're afraid of it, it's not nice, but just a different understanding that a lot of this is rooted in disadvantage. But I remember, when I moved away from my estate, just up the road, because I got decanted to new-builds, some of the stuff that was happening there was still happening around here, but the way I felt about it was like...this feels different. It's like...because this area is so...now, looking a little bit bougie, there's more of what they call social mix here, so it's like...there's a lot more like I guess...I would say like police – not policing but it's just like, em, that is seen as an actual nuisance, and I think, when it used to take place on the estate, it was definitely considered not nice, but I think the understanding of it was very, very different, and I kind of just felt like, for people who are experiencing that, for people who have not had the best opportunities in life, to be in an



environment where it's like...you're almost suffocated, like there is so much scrutiny on you and your lifestyle, I don't think it's always nice, and I don't think it actually helps anyone. And if they're spending all this money on rebuilding this area, if you can change the lives of people with that money, you know, get people away from situations when they haven't been given the best opportunities in life, I don't get why the resources would go to make somewhere look nice but not actually get rid of the issues that you said you was going to get rid of.

And I also think, as well, sometimes, I just think to myself like how...like what did you think, moving here, that you was going to...that this was place was going to be some fancy place because the houses are newly build like, you know...? Hopefully, this reminds everyone that a lot of the things that they're getting sold with these new-builds are just BS and it's like, em, all these, you know, companies that are just like selling this area, like, "Oh, it's like up and coming, and it's very cultural..." and it's just like...it just shows you that like they're so far removed of what it actually means to live here, and it can be quite a big wake-up call I actually think. I was thinking like, well, if I was one of the people who've moved in here and like this was going down, I would feel cheated in a way because I know the way it's getting sold – it's not actually reflecting what it means to live here. And they're actually relying on those horrible stereotypes to say, "It was like that. It's not like that no more – don't worry, like the trouble is all gone!" So, it's just like...yeah, I just think it's wrong.

Kyra: Yeah, that's such an interesting point that you make of like how crime is seen almost differently in...like in an estate and, you know, in like a new-build area, somewhere that's been kind of like gentrified and regenerated, because it's like...adds to this kind of perception of like, you know, that's what happens in estate, like that's kind of what comes with it, comes with the territory, but don't try that stuff up the road. But it's like...this is the same area, it's the same communities, and it's like...just because the backdrop is basically different, like just because we're in kind of like a different environment, but not really....

Nayyar: Yeah. I think, as well, it made me worry about the approaches to solving some of those issues because I think, previously, there was a more empathetic understanding that, em, although it was...it was awful, like to routinely witness different forms of crime is not a nice thing to grow up around and it's not something...you know, there's only a certain level of empathy that anyone could have really – after a while, you get frustrated yourself. But it's like the approaches to supporting people who end up in those circumstances, I think, when it's like a gentrified estate where there's like more of a focus on money and, you know, fancy aesthetics and stuff, I think I get a bit worried because I'm thinking, if this is still happening here, are they going to approach this in an empathetic way or are they going to approach this in a very criminalising way? Is it going to be a situation where "This cannot happen here – we must get rid of the issue quickly, and let's criminalise everybody..."? And it's just like...



for that reason, it scares me because it's just like why did you regenerate this place and tell us that it's going to give people a better quality of life? All it was doing was making people more excluded and then the environment is so bougie and fancy and all new now that you can't even empathise with people anymore and you're just going to criminalise people to quickly eradicate the issue because it's getting a bit embarrassing or what...? I just get worried. I'm just like....how are you going to solve this now? Are you going to criminalise people, because that's what we have seen, or are you going to actually use some of that investment and change people's lives like you said you would?

Kyra: Yeah, absolutely. And also, like moving people out of an area isn't going to get rid of the issues that...you know, whether they commit crime or not, like what those issues are all rooted in, like it's not going to magically kind of like disappear. And I think, yeah, like all this crime is rooted in kind of, you know, not having access to certain resources, racism, systemic racism...so...yeah, it is worrying, for sure.

Nayyar: It's so unsustainable as well. If I think about it, it's like...it just makes more sense to invest in infrastructure and welfare and work closely with people, and very meaningfully and intentionally, rather than focusing on money or like... Like I'm just thinking like, if you're moving...if you're moving, technically, dispersing people everywhere, like the social issues still exist, and it's like are you waiting for an even bigger monster to happen or...? You know, like...and it's like, even when I see stuff on the news now, like about...and probably, mostly, a lot of the time, they play it down, young people involved in crime and stuff, it's just like... what do you think is going to happen if you don't invest in people or we live in like constant crisis of like living costs, crisis of young people, and like the mental health experience? Like what do you think is going to happen, like if you're...if you're focusing on giving really rich people tax-breaks all the time, and giving like all these new apartments and flats to like really, really affluent people, then like if you're spending your money that way, what do you think is actually going to happen? It's just a wholly unsustainable system and it's only going to be like something waiting to erupt. I don't know why people are shocked or...you know...

Kyra: And I guess, from your research, what have you noticed in terms of like the major implications of gentrification for young people specifically?

Nayyar: Oh, Kyra! This is like a little preview because I haven't even written [about that yet] so [everyone's getting a little preview] [laughing]!

Kyra: You heard it here first!



Nayyar: Right! I would say that one of the main things...one of the main things that stuck with me, which feels like it's unrelated but it's totally related, is one of the main themes that's come out of my research is just how resilient and strong and adaptive and, em, sustainable, em, minoritized communities are, like how...how hopeful those communities are, how resilient they are. [And I fought bitterness] to even say that because it's like why do particular groups have to be superheroes just to live...? Like...but it also makes me really happy that, you know, I'm part of a community that are so amazing and who adapt to such seriously challenging situations. So, that was one of the main things that came out of my research, is just how...how, you know, I would say, really...it involves some really big level cleverness as well, just adapting to really difficult situations constantly, and the level of hope as well is one of the main things that came out of my research.

But in terms of the implications of gentrification of the estate, the main thing is displacement. So, although a lot of the people have been decanted, so they still technically live on the estate, it's displacement through either being moved away or just emotionally displaced from a place that you recognised as home, and how that makes you feel. And just kind of like, when I asked my participants how they felt about the estate when they were young compared to how they talk about it now, it's very clear to see how much their feelings and their emotions towards the estate have wavered over time. I think it's normal to move away from where you grew up from – I think that's just kind of like life for a lot of people in the UK, but I think there's something different when the place you lived is destroyed. So, I think that the...the level...the feelings of displacement, either actually moving away or seeing people that you know move away, and losing that, with really no power of your own and no power of their own, and also just feeling that loss, that lack of connection with the place that you called home, while still living there, is a very weird and alienating feeling. So, I think that is one thing.

And also, the fact that a lot of the spaces that gave people opportunities to belong are gone. The play areas, they just don't have that feeling. A lot of the play areas are actually privatised, so it's like, whilst the whole estate used to be open to everybody, and it was quite a big estate, and you can jump from one block to the other, or visit someone from this place, or you could just walk through wherever, you can't do that anymore, and I think that means [...], you know... It's just that you...you don't...that feeling of belonging is...is wavering and it's not really the same anymore, and the community connections, as a result, are not there anymore either.

And one of the things I was speaking to Adam about is that like...one of my main points is that people, young people especially, have been excluded from the processes of gentrification, or regeneration, sorry, but it's not...it doesn't just stop there. There's an



outcome to that. Like when you don't actually cater to the needs of a community but you go and write policy to say "This is going to be for the needs of those communities", there's actually outcomes to all of this, and, you know, traditionally, all these labels towards council estates in terms of like, "Oh, this place causes like alienation", "This place is reproducing cycles of poverty", and all those horrible kind of ways of looking at it, or just saying that these places cause exclusion in society, it's just like...what about when you put like someone, a social housing resident, next-door to a penthouse – do you think that that makes people feel like they are going to have [?] class mobility and they're going to wake up a millionaire as well? Like do people even interact? Not really. And do you feel excluded in that space? Yes. You feel like you do not belong anymore. The differences are just as stark as they were before. So, it's just like...these places actually cause exclusion as well, just as much as they were [labelling the former estates].

So, those are some of the implications I think I've found already. I'm still going to do more research, a few more interviews, anyway, because it's still nuanced, like there's even... There are some implications but there's also some participants – and I know this as well myself too – that really...found life on the estate challenging - I think stigma has a big role to play in that - and so they feel grateful that they've been able to move away from that, just have a better quality of living that they weren't always given for the longest time. So, there are some implications for some people as well it's been positive for them as well so...yeah...

Kyra: So, I guess, what do you think can be done on like the individual level, like how can local communities combat, you know, the gentrification of their neighbourhoods, and I guess support young people in that process?

Nayyar: I feel like local communities can do a lot, but I feel like, as well, em...I feel like it shouldn't just be them, and I feel like they don't have as much power as central government, and I think that, in order to...to kind of do this meaningfully, they kind of have to just start with the former community and not just see pretty housing as a solution to social...deep social issues and social injustice because that's kind of like what they've gone with now, clearly. Because when I think about the aims of like supporting people in employment or education, there's not really been much support in employment or education. Young people now face risk of long periods of unemployment, and education hasn't proved to be the best route out of poverty. So, it's like...you have to really invest in strong infrastructure and welfare for people, em, to better their lives, and do that rather than just go into places and knock down buildings and say like this is actually going to get rid of all your issues because it doesn't really...it doesn't get rid of every issue really. And I think the focus...I mean, I would say the focus should be on that from local communities to speak about issues like that, and also for central government to pay attention to that, because I think that will give people different understanding, if they don't feel it already, which I'm sure they do, of things like



urban regeneration and gentrification, and also show people that, although these spaces kind of start looking nice and you can, you know, do your lovely like Tiktok posts in these places and like have a little, you know, cute aesthetic day, to also be really responsible about the things that you do on a day-to-day basis and what these spaces mean for some people. So, it's like multi-layered, I would say, but I think just to...to combat this issue, I think, just more awareness of...and being responsible about how these spaces reproduce these issues, but also more awareness as well, and the fact that gentrification I think has become such a big issue for a lot of people because there's this huge focus on housing and making spaces look nice in order to get rid of real social problems, and it doesn't really...it doesn't do that, and there needs to be more focus on how to do that, and a lot of the time, it needs more welfare, needs more care, needs more meaningful approaches, and in the interests of people rather than private companies.

Kyra: So, a question I usually like to end on is: what would you like to see happen or see develop within higher education in the next 10 years? You can relate this back to higher education or maybe fit it to your research a bit more, just the wider community in general, but, yeah, what would you like to see happen or develop?

Nayyar: Ooh, em, I would say...good question! I would like to see...I mean, there's a lot of work happening now, which is nice to see, but just a lot more work on...like I always say, bringing all different types of minoritized voices to the education, the education environment. I think it's...me and you, like we've been able to celebrate, you know...you know like how we said before, you know, just this literature and this research and that hard work of people, em, just more of that, like more...and also, as well, open to even, you know, newer forms of voices because ideas and experiences are constantly changing, so what I might say right now is not necessarily going to be the best indicator of life in like...a year from now maybe, you know. So, just being open to that.

Also, heavy focus on challenging forms of knowledge production in order to honour as many groups of people from all different aspects of life, as much as possible, to honour like all different forms of knowledge and different ways of being, to be open to that, and also to have a curriculum that embraces that through assessments, through teaching, through supporting students.

I think, as well, I would love to see, in a really ideal world, I would love to see like education just being free. I know that sounds – and I still probably need to do research on that, but I would love to see it to be free, and also to be taught in a very responsible way and like not to share one form of knowledge or particular ideas of what is considered to be the truth, but to be free and also to embrace all the different forms of knowledge. I think it would bring it



back to maybe some of those principles of like critical pedagogy – I think that’s what they call it – and that like sharing knowledge, being able to embrace other forms of knowledge, actually makes people happy, helps one another. So, I think, something like that, like that’s in like a truly ideal world, I would love to see that. I think that we’d see a lot more people in education and see a lot more...just I think it would help social justice issues and I think it would help just the world in general. But, also, as well, like education, I guess, isn’t for always everyone. I just wouldn’t say that all knowledge exists in these environments either. But yeah, like I would say like that’s kind of what I would want to see in education.

I’d like even more initiatives, like how Westminster has, like the prison project initiative – just being as inviting to education and making these spaces as inviting and as inclusive as possible. I don’t want to say that in like a...just because, you know, it’s kind of like... I don’t like saying things for the sake of saying things because I feel like that gets thrown [around the floor], but, honestly, to truly make it that kind of space because, if my experience is anything to go by, I know that it can really change people’s lives, and everyone deserves to have that opportunity.

Kyra: Amazing... What a perfect answer, can I just say?!

Nayyar: Thanks!

Kyra: Nayyar, I can’t thank you enough for joining me on this episode of the podcast. It’s so great to just hear a little bit more about your research but of course like just you personally and your background and your upbringing and how you came to Sociology, and, yeah, I’m really looking forward to seeing what’s next for you, and, yeah, hopefully we get to have you on the podcast again when you’re finished with your PhD and, yeah...!

Nayyar: Oh yeah, definitely! I would love to do that. I’d love to be back here again. I really appreciate you, Kyra, as well, like I’m so glad that I can be part of your journey as well. And, as well, I really enjoyed this show – like you’re a really good host, Kyra, like this could...you could make some serious money with it! Go into presenting!

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