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Podcast transcript:

Fatima: Hello, audio listeners, welcome to the Pedagogies for Social Justice Podcast. I am Fatima Maatwk. I'll be your host today, and I am very happy to welcome Dr Pasi Ahonen, who is a Senior Lecturer in Management at Essex Business School, and really has a very interesting and inspiring journey across geographies, but you'll hear more from him. So, welcome, Pasi, and thank you very much for being with us today.

Pasi: Thank you. I'm happy to be here.

Fatima: Thank you. I think we'll start just talking a little bit about your background, and maybe you can tell us where you're from...

Pasi: I was born in Finland, but, somehow, when people kind of asked that question, they... have an idea that you somehow reflect that place, and I don't...I don't know if I do anymore. So, I don't know where I'm from.

Fatima: Yeah, this is exactly why we ask this question, because it's not as simple as just saying where we were born. Or maybe, where is home for you, at the moment?

Pasi: Home is where my partner is.

Fatima: And can you tell us a bit about your educational journey, so what did you study, why did you choose to study it?

Pasi: Em [laughing], how much time do we have?! My...my educational journey has been...a peculiarly odd one I think. I started my studies at the University of Turku in Finland in Cultural History, and I did... At that time, Finland was not part of the European Union, and the degrees had not been...synchronised, so when you entered the university, you automatically did a Master's degree, so you did what would be considered a Bachelor's degree and a Master's degree together as one degree – that was the degree that you would



do. So, I did that, em, and...that was...that was very kind of identity forming for me. I still consider myself as a cultural historian and I...I still don't know what social scientists really are trying to do, even though I am in Social Science, but most of the time, I'm confused. So, I'm a cultural historian. I'm more of a cultural historian than I am Finnish [laughing], in terms of kind of identities. My sense of my self comes more from that than...than national background. I did that in four years, which, at the time, was the fastest time anybody had done it. Other people have done it faster since. People did not tend to study very quickly in Finland in the old days. It was not at all abnormal to take 10 years to do your degree, em, free education and things like that [laughing]. It was a wonderful environment. Also, in the sense that I...I was able to completely design my own degree. Everything was in these kind of little nuggets of information which then formed various kinds of constellations and levels of study, and I was able to do exactly what I wanted. So, I did Cultural History, North American Studies, Philosophy, as my... Am I forgetting something now...? I think those – no, and English Literature, or English Language. Sorry, English Philology, that's what the degree was. I studied English, the language of English, and, em, and English Literature a little bit also. So, em, it's a very...a very odd degree, in very...very many ways.

And after that – actually, as a part of that degree, in my third year, I went to the University of Georgia on a scholarship, Georgia Rotary Student Fellowship. The money for that fellowship comes from the Coca Cola company.

Fatima: Interesting!

Pasi: Yeah [laughing]. And I was, for a year, I was at the University of Georgia, in Athens, Georgia, which was another deeply influencing experience for me, in a number of ways. I got to see how the American university system operates and what the classes are like, and it was... In some ways, it was a steep learning curve; in another way, it was a bit disappointing. It was not as a kind of an intellectual environment as I had...got used to, but it was, in some sense, much more, kind of curiously, demanding. I remember still, in the first exam that I did in the History course on American Modern History or something like that, I got an F, which was a huge blow to my ego because I was...I was a fairly good student in my own mind. And it was all about lack of detail [laughing]. I was just giving the broad strokes, and that's not how you do it, at least not for that professor, not for...not in that setting. So I very quickly learned different ways of doing...academic work.

So, that influenced me a lot, and then I went back to Finland for a year. I wrote my Master's dissertation and I didn't really see anybody. I remember...I basically just went to the grocery store, and wrote, and listened to Metallica. I'm not a Metallica fan but somehow Enter



Sandman kind of captured my energy needs. I don't think I've listened to that album since. It was overdone all that year, but it...it's the soundtrack of my dissertation.

Then I left again. I didn't feel like I was fitting in Finland, in the Finnish environment, anymore. I left and I went to...of all places, I went to the University of Saskatchewan, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, which is...which is a wonderful institution, deeply underrated I think, just because it's in the middle of the [prairie plains]. It is a true old-school intellectual university, or was back then. I found another wonderful intellectual community there, as well as my current partner, and I did kind of postgraduate studies in History there for a year. Went back to Finland again, summer, and I wrote...a thing that doesn't really exist in the Anglo context, which is a licentiate degree dissertation, which is sort of an M.Phil. but...but not really. It's a bit more than an M.Phil. So, I did that in the summer. So, I'm actually a Licentiate in Philosophy, in Cultural History, as far as my...kind of official degrees go.

Then I left again, in autumn of 1994, and I started PhD studies in History at the University of Victoria, in British Columbia, Canada. I was there for six years, and then I withdrew from the programme – I didn't complete that degree. And I moved into mobile technology [laughing]. I became...I became a Director of Communications and Partnerships in a small mobile technology company that was developing location technology. At the time – nowadays, those kinds of things are very much everyday, but that was 25 years ago, and we were only imagining the kinds of things that are now very commonplace. So, I was out of academia for... It seemed like a long time, but actually, it's just four years. And then I was recruited to do a PhD or Doctorate in Management by the Dean of Lappeenranta University of Technology Business School, and I started a part-time PhD in...I think it was 2004, and that took a long time [laughing]! I finished my PhD in December 2014. But I was working at the Lappeenranta University of Technology for a couple of years, and, in Finland, PhD students are salaried employees, at least in some occasions, and I was a salaried employee PhD student.

Then my partner got a job in Canada, so, in 2008, we moved to Sudbury, Ontario, a little mining town, generally in the middle of nowhere, and I was there for...a couple of years, and then we did a kind of insane decision that I got a job in the UK as kind of a postdoc, even though I was pre-doc, but a postdoc job at the University of West of England. So, that's the beginning of my academic career and the end of my...sort of an end of my education, even though my education continued [laughing]...continued quite a while after that.

Fatima: That's a really inspiring journey. It's not just across geographies, but also disciplines and... I think you tapped on so many important things, like the different formats of study, with the Bachelor and Master's together. I remember this also being in Germany available



until a few years ago, so people used to do a Diplome, which would be undergrad and a Master's, and, in Egypt, we actually have the License, we call it, so it's interesting to see these similarities. Did you have a soundtrack to your PhD dissertation?

Pasi: Em...no [laughing]. It lasted so long, so I don't have any... And maybe that's the thing: I don't have any music attached to my...my PhD, and maybe that's why it took so long [laughing]. It's not an accident, by the way, that Germans have a similar system, because Finns have basically copied the educational system from Germany, possibly with some improvements, I'm not sure, but yeah... We are not...we are not at all this kind of Anglo... Anglo arrangement, and that has only come through European Union, even though...even though we are not there anymore, but the British have certainly influenced that a lot.

Fatima: And I wonder if you could tell us about maybe a book or a show, something you read or watched, growing up, that kind of...you still think about sometimes or that even randomly pops to your mind now...

Pasi: Kind of going back... I don't really have...I don't really have anything like that, like if... kind of growing up. I grew up in the 1980s in Finland, em...[that one has gone]... I more have maybe music again. I think...I found Bob Marley's music and...and American Blues on my own. I was about 13 and 14, and nobody listened to blues and nobody listened to reggae, at the time. And Bob Marley's album, 'Positive Vibration', and the [cut there] called 'War', has maybe been the most influential thing. The line...there's a line there, you know, which goes something like this, that until...the colour of a man's skin has no more significance than the colour of his eyes, there's a war. And I think that set my...intellectual journey, in some way.

Fatima: Thank you so much for sharing this with us. I will now ask you some questions that are about decolonisation and antiracism in higher education and also in your field, so Management, Organisation Studies, and just to start, how are decolonisation and antiracism relevant to Management and Organisation Studies, in your opinion?

Pasi: It's as I say, it's kind of...where do you start [laughing]?! The field of Management & Organisation is basically rooted in kind of colonial capitalist practice of power, so this...the field wouldn't exist without capitalism, and capitalism implicated in colonialism, and vice versa. So, it's born out of the world that those things produced, and, quite interestingly, it has been very, very, very reluctant to investigate origins, em, as a...as a field of study. This is, as far as kind of fields of study go, it's fantastical that this field doesn't have a sense of its own history. As far as I know, it's the only field that decidedly, actively, avoids thinking about where it comes from. In addition to the history, the kind of practices that we have in the



field, and practices that we kind of...teach to our students, are deeply embedded in the colonial capitalist system. We tend to – and this is not exclusive in any way, but, as a field, taking the kind of whole weight of the field, we tend to...we tend to reproduce those things. There's some attempts within the field to challenge and create alternatives and so forth, but, em...this is quite recent. Yeah. So, we're deeply in it.

Fatima: Could you give us maybe an example or two of something where...because, often, with what you said, it's very hard to say "This is how it's colonial" because it's very...it's a very broad question, could you give us a couple of examples maybe of something...that is easy to explain to people, like this is coloniality in the field or this is a colonial nuance?

Pasi: Well, in some sense, em...if we think of the field that much of my work is in...in diversity [and its] management, em...the categories in which we think of diversity, for example, come from colonial categories of organising populations for purposes of exploitation. Now, we're using the same categories for the purposes of empowering them, supposedly. So, there's...that's one example [laughing], for example.

Another one, maybe a little bit more kind of complicated issue, is the whole idea of gender, the idea of gender and the way that we think it operates is specifically historical Anglo understanding of relations, which is not at all the same way it operates elsewhere, but, again, we then go round recognising gender relations around the world and putting them into this kind of Anglo formation, which, again, has taken place and primarily formed during the 19th century.

Fatima: These are really important examples and I think especially the one with the categories because it's constantly then mentioned in relation to this being about equality and inclusion, so it makes it a very challenging conversation to have sometimes. I wonder if you could think of something that lecturers or students could do to kind of address or challenge the colonial nuances of curricula?

Pasi: There's a...yeah [laughing], there's a...in some senses, there's an easy answer to this thing, kind of...you can almost give a kind of laundry list, do this, do this, do this, so I can go through the laundry list [laughing]. Like there's kind of challenging expanding the Western canon... It's...the examples that we still use, em, come from...usually they come from America, they come from Western organisations, Western research settings. Everybody is called Jack or Jill in case studies. Even like this pressure even for people from other cultural settings, when they write at the so-called international level of research, to...translate things so that everybody becomes Jack and Jill. So, expansion of canon is necessary. It's also



challenging because...now there is...with digital media and these kinds of...kind of fragmentation of the world, in some sense, we have very few connecting points, very few points that are familiar to large enough numbers of people. So, when you get a classroom full of 250, 300 people, as you do at the University of Essex – and the University of Essex is one of the most international universities the UK has, if not the most international – the amount of kind of context and settings and experiences in the classroom is just immense! So, how...? And...that's one thing. And then the other thing is that they've come there to learn business as it's done in the West. So, em...are you then...? If you teach them something else than the Western canon, are you then actually not giving the client what they want? That's another...another debate. But the...the kind of lack of shared context is challenging, pedagogically also, because then you end up talking about the big five IT companies – everybody knows Google, everybody knows Apple, everybody knows Meta. So, then you draw examples from those because there's some kind of recognised basis for that. So there's kind of...there are very understandable, very practical reasons why the old structures of power get reproduced in everyday practices of teaching and learning, because it's just easy, it's just available. It's been so...imperialism continues to be so efficient and effective that we think that...that's the world, and to do otherwise takes a lot of effort from everybody, students and lecturers, and the university system is such that we are so busy, and the busyness keeps us from investigating things properly. So, the [system's reproduction], the busyness in the system, is part of the way in which the dominant structures of power reproduce themselves. We're so...so busy chasing our own tails that there's...there's no... there's no fear or chance of revolution ever coming from universities.

But what can we then do [laughing]? That was a bit cynical! We can change the canon. We can try to introduce something. We can try to use more inclusive pedagogical practices also, although, again, there are kind of massive challenges there. How do you...how do you inclusively teach a classroom of 350 people? Like I...if somebody has an answer to that, please email, send an email. I'm on the interwebs. These kinds of interventions tend to require human relationships and proximity and...and some kind of...kind of limited exposure, so when you are broadcasting, which is basically what you're doing in large lecture rooms, how inclusive that can be... I don't know. These kinds of things, I'm struggling with.

I think what can be done, and what should be done, and what is maybe the easiest thing to do, is increasing the transparency of what it is that you're doing. So, you're just explicit that this is American, this is British, this comes from here, this comes from there, it has these kinds of [effects], so that even if you are using the canonical examples, you are kind of denaturalising their universality and making it apparent that there are other options. And then the questions arise, well, why don't we talk about those other options? Then we can have a conversation. So, I think...I think kind of provincializing [commercialism] is maybe the fairest thing that...that should be done, and this way, this way you don't have the kind of challenge of expanding the canon, which has kind of...it has material consequences. But this



kind of...increasing transparency is...it's cheap and easy to do, which is important [laughing] in business schools. And you can do it to large...larger audiences. This kind of creating spaces for marginalised voices and these kinds of things is often kind of desired. Again, there's kind of very clear margin...kind of material conditions that...that may or may not enable that.

You...I fear, at least in business schools, which are, from universities' points of view, tend to be kind of cash-cows, business schools are not really considered to be places where "the real research is done". For those of you who are listening to me and don't see me doing quotation marks with my fingers, I'm just saying that I'm doing quotation marks with my fingers. Business schools tend to exist for the purposes of revenue generation for universities, and then "the real work", quote, unquote – ah, that's how you do it – is done elsewhere. This is...might be...might be a bit controversial statement, but if you look at how the revenue generation in universities is done, it's obvious like universities' business schools can be responsible for up to a quarter of a university's revenue stream, and you know exactly then what the role is there.

So, when that is the case, then the learning conditions for Business students – and this is what actually infuriates me – the learning conditions for Business students, who are the ones who bring in the money, tend to be the worst in the university. Those studying Art History – I've studied Art History, I'm a Cultural Historian. I had the most wonderful learning experience where five or 10 people were in a seminar room having discussions. That's...it's nothing that resembles me being able to reproduce anything like that in my classroom, at the moment, in the British system, in the business school. So, there are kind of very real pedagogical limitations to what we can do.

So then, that can kind of...maybe goes into then what students can do. [The thing is] that students, in some sense, have to make demands. Again, I recognise making demands is very difficult when you've...I think you've been actively disenfranchised. I can only use that word in some sense because that's my experience – that's what I see my students being... They come to my classroom because they want a good job. That's the function of being there. So, they've been disenfranchised from their own education – like, in some sense, education has been turned into a vehicle for getting a good job, and then you don't have really an active sense of yourself as an agent in your own learning. You are there to...as a vessel to be poured in this important information that will then get you a better job. And I...I fully understand and support the importance of getting good jobs because life is easier that way, and we have lots of those students at Essex, and I'm very happy to be at Essex because of that. We are a university where I think 94% of our students come from state schools, in British terms, and we are educating students who have universities closer to them but those universities are so elite that they educate other students rather than the students that they



should be educating, who live around there. So that... I'm not saying that people shouldn't have this kind of desire and wish to better their lives, but it's more about the discourses and framing of what this embetterment means and what it entails, and what is part of it and what is not part of it – [including the] university's role in the development of your curriculum in the business school, for example, doesn't seem to be part of it. Like business schools themselves don't offer it as an option, but also business schools' students do not demand it – they don't tend to. And we are kind of...we're probably structurally actively discouraging any kind of possibilities of actual...effective participation. Like if we have a student voice committee once a term where people can tell what they would like things to... how they would like things to be improved, it's [laughing]...it's a bureaucratic measure that is designed to actually limit the forms of participation rather than include those forms of participation. It's there as a kind of typical bureaucratic measure... We could probably link it to colonialism if we did careful enough research in which you produce these kinds of carefully delimited bureaucratic processes in which...this is how you're allowed to take part in your own...own educational formation, and the rest of the time, you just have to run around like a headless chicken. So, there's this kind of... So, demand makes change, but what...with what resources?

There is this kind of movement of "Why is my curriculum so white?" and these kinds of things, which I think are wonderful things. Interestingly, again, these kinds of movements seem to be taking place in elite institutions. So, students in elite institutions have more capacities to raise these kinds of questions, whereas, students in non-elite institutions – and this is very, very specific for the UK, the kind of Anglo world, where you have elite institutions and not so elite institutions, and everybody knows which ones are elite institutions and which are not. We have rankings that go up and down on the ladder, but that doesn't change the actual knowledge of [laughing]...of knowing which are the elite institutions. I think, in these cases, you can have these kinds of debates and so forth, but, again, how much do they change the nature of higher education in general...? I see them being more limited in their effects than...they themselves probably want to be. And, again, there are kind of very real material conditions that – I sound like a Marxist. I'm not a Marxist. I really am not a Marxist [laughing], but...but there are very real material conditions that... that limit the possibilities of these kinds of changes in certain settings, and it's those settings where the change is maybe the most important. So, this is kind of, just to throw another thing in there, this is just elites reproducing themselves again in...even through...even through kind of...these kinds of actions that challenge, but even challenging is then possible only in certain positions in this hierarchy.

But, when I was a student, we had very kind of active student associations and things like that, and part of that activism was political, but Student Union activities and student association activities, at least in UK universities, seems to be more kind of leisure time directed or kind of extracurricular rather than directed towards the kind of educational



journey enrolment or design. When...in Finland, we were part of the faculty committees. There was student representation in these kinds of...all of the kind of decision-making bodies. There was always student representation in all levels. In the kind of neoliberal UK university, students have the Student Voice Committee and that's it. So, even if there were desirers of doing these things, there are kind of strong, strong structural impediments to...to doing things.

So, I'm not really answering your question – I'm just showing why doing things is really difficult [laughing] and probably what happened, but...but kind of...to be realistic rather than having this kind of long list of do this and do that and so forth, it's important, because I'm a Foucaultian. I am a Foucaultian, not a Marxist, although Foucault [is quite] Marxian himself – he's not Marxist, but Marxian. And you have to...have to have a sense of...how power operates to be able to effect change, and that's why I usually end up talking about...relations of power rather than what can be done.

Fatima: Yeah. Honestly, I think you answered the question perfectly because it's very hard to tell people "This is the list, list is what you do, and then you're decolonised" or even decolonising, because it is about all these structural issues, and it will take different shape and form in every classroom, in every module or university, so... And I think you really showed us, in what you said, how it operates and that there is actually sometimes little point in telling people, "This is the checklist – go do that" because the structures don't allow you to do that anyway. I'm wondering if you could tell us about...so, thinking of research, not necessarily all methods align with decolonial thought, so what are your thoughts on things we could do or think of or consider when choosing methods to kind of be...well, to ensure we're committed, at least, to decoloniality and antiracism?

Pasi: Yeah, the methodological questions are very...very interesting. In my formation into a cultural historian, methodology was fundamental, also to know what Cultural History is. I mean, in the UK context, they don't because, when I say Cultural History, I talk about something that has not really taken root in the UK. I'm talking about kind of Franco-German tradition of...of theoretically and methodologically involved historical inquiry that basically traces itself to the Annales School in France. We can have another interview on that. So, the methods are really quite important in how they change the conditions of possibility of knowledge production. So, the Annales School really kind of, for example, invested in developing new methods, new understandings, of what constitutes a source – how do you combine sources in ways that you can investigate things that, in the kind of common historical parlance, didn't have any sources? They...they went ahead and looked at sources in a new way, read them against the grain. They found ways of...combining different, disparate source materials, in a new way, to tell stories that hadn't been told before. So, from that kind of background, moving into questions of social justice and these kinds of



things, it kind of...the same kinds of approaches and techniques, you can bring with you. There's a lot of talk about, nowadays, kind of alternative epistemologies, like the indigenous knowledges and, you know, how could we call them, Global South knowledges. There's...that kind of thing.

I think...if we think of the field of Management and Organisation, I think our field is...very, very resistant to new epistemologies, especially. It's happy to include new evidence, but that evidence has to fit a fairly narrow epistemological vein in knowledge production. So, that's not easy to do, and if you're an aspiring academic, usually, you will be advised against it, and by the time you've acquired enough seniority, then it's...you've committed yourself and you're in that pathway, so...there's elites reproducing themselves again.

Reflection is often kind of...touted as a good way, and it's not a bad way. It kind of...[Buko] has this kind of line that goes something like this: that, basically, the gist is that we don't often know what the doing of the things that we do does. So, if you consider your methods, not from the point of view of what it is that you're doing, and what...what the methods do, but what the doing of the methods does, I think that will...that will help.

And kind of considering how findings are shared, and with whom they are shared... The neoliberal university, and especially the British system, with its Research Excellence Framework, is extremely narrow. It recognises only certain...certain ways of doing things, and if you don't do those things, you're...in the worst case, your job is in jeopardy. So, it puts people in a difficult situation because, if you try to decolonise, for example, but then you publish this decolonising work in the top journals of the field, what are you doing? Are you influencing the field because your work now gets more exposure or are you reproducing the elite? Can you be doing both things at the same time? If you shun all of these journals and you write...you publish in, you know, some kind of collective publications and things like that, can you have a career? How many careers? Like if one person can have a career [or a small] number of people can have a career making their own...kind of making their own tools at the same time as they're doing their work, but if the numbers increase, can that happen again? These kinds of things... But, yeah, consider who it is that you're talking to and where you share your findings.

I made an interesting experiment in this last REF cycle where...I primarily focused on book chapters, writing book chapters, because they tend to get read, and my REF submission wasn't very strong because book chapters are...not considered to be important from the point of view of REF, even though some of the book chapters that I've written are reasonably well cited and some people have...have done actual empirical studies, published in good journals, which effectively confirm what I kind of theoretically [laughing] argue in a book



chapter. But that book chapter was not part of the REF. So, these kinds of...funny things kind of...happen, but you can't...in some sense, you can't worry about it too much. The REF is a game that needs to be played because it's there. I'm a Research Director now in our group, so I will be playing that game, but, em...but you mustn't forget that the real impact and contribution happens irrespective of that. You might be able to tie it into it, but that's not... that's not where important things happen. And I'm sure I'm infuriating a few people now, but...but it...for those of us who are in the UK, it's good to remember that not all university systems operate in this way. The UK is an anomaly in the way that it does so-called quality assessment of knowledge production. And we could, again, we could link it to colonialism if we wanted to because it, in some ways, is...there's a coloniality at work in that regime.

But...so while methods are important, what I would say though is that methodological solutions will not solve epistemological problems. So, it doesn't... There's only so far you can go by being reflective with your methods, if your epistemology is still deeply embedded in... in coloniality, for example. And that's where it gets kind of...interesting, is that, for example, in my field, sort of – I'm not sure if it's my field anymore, but the field that I've written much of my kind of academic work of diversity and its management, there's a kind of epistemological problem in that field that...that tends...ends up kind of working against the... what it says its aims are to achieve ultimately, of social justice and equality and these kinds of things. But...it...it happens that...when your kind of epistemological choices are limited to the few available in the field, the best methods in the world are not going to break you out of...out of that. If you do gender analysis, that has...you kind of inadvertently reproduce the Anglo understanding of gender in a, let's say, some non-Western setting, you have a problem that is not a methodological one, it's an epistemological one.

Fatima: Yeah. It's I think similar to the question about decolonising in learning and teaching, the one in research is as massive and as structurally also loaded. I really appreciate what you said regarding the REF and how this whole context in the UK shapes such questions. Maybe one last question before I move to our actual last question... So, because you mentioned EDI, and I also did my PhD on EDI work, and I just wonder, if you think of EDI and decolonisation work, how are these two different, in your opinion?

Pasi: The relationship is...is complex. They are often presented as...as a pair that somehow is complementary, but if you tried to do a Venn diagram, you'd fail [laughing]! But if you were, nevertheless, only given the chance of doing a Venn diagram [laughing], which is a very typical kind of Management and Organisation kind of thing – yeah, there are all these other possibilities, but you are only allowed to do this, so you have to do this, so let's do a Venn diagram. If we do a Venn diagram, then there's a bit of an overlap and then there's bits that are not included in the overlap.



They are kind of epistemologically potentially fundamentally different, and that fundamental difference is often ignored because they are kind of politically aligned. But EDI work tends to come from Western epistemologies, and it's not particularly reflective of those epistemologies either. And decolonial, postcolonial, work is in relationship or conversation with Western epistemologies but it's more carefully critical of them. To give you a really kind of caricature of an example, and this...I don't know if people are going to get Gary Lineker on my [behind] for this, but the current government that we have in the UK, in some sense, is a triumph of EDI work – like if you applied certain kinds of markers, you would find female, eh, women ministers, women ministers of colour or BAME or whatever the language is, we have the Prime Minister himself is of Indian background, so, in some sense, you have a government that, on certain kinds of markers, is the most diverse there ever has been in the UK – and it's an awful, awful, awful government. They're doing awful, awful, awful things. So, em, just because you get certain kinds of people, from certain kinds of...highly abstracted kind of backgrounds, I would say, in this case, like our Prime Minister is a good example, he's part of the elite – that's what matters. That's what matters. That's the only thing really that matters. So... And especially kind of mainstream EDI work doesn't...it's not concerned with this. It's not...it's not looking in any way trying to change structures, change systems. If it's trying to change a system, it is trying to find ways, for example, to report women in leadership roles. It's not investigating what does it mean to be a leader, what does it mean to have a hierarchical institution that, quote/unquote, “needs” leading. It's not looking at how we've been organised and are there other ways of organising. It's trying to find ways of broadening the small pool from which we draw the new elite. So, I think that those kinds of questions are the kind of fundamental differences between decolonising work and EDI work, where EDI work can be – and it's not at all a given that it will be – but it can be harnessed, it can be domesticated, and it can be tamed, and it can be turned politically against its own intentions and purposes. And how this has been kind of discursively managed is quite wonderful. It's really worth looking into it more because it really has been successful. Whereas, kind of decolonising is less likely to do that, although [laughing] I...I recently heard, and I will not give any details about this, but there's a government...there's a government ministry was hiring new staff, and this person that I knew applied for this job, and they were interested in this person because of their kind of deep commitment to decolonisation and all these kinds of things. The key question, at least for this person's mind, became a key question for them, was: how do we make money with decolonisation? So, there's nothing... there's nothing that you can't try to [?] and monetise. So, it would be...foolish for us to think that decolonisation, just because it's a decolonisation or whatever, is somehow resistant to co-optation and these kinds of things. It's already happening.

And of course the neoliberal university itself is already doing this because people can make careers out of publishing in top journals on decolonising topics that can influence their fields, and they match all the criteria of thought-leaders in their fields, and so forth, and then what has happened? Have we changed things or have we reproduced things? To me, this is a genuine question because I do not know. I don't know if it's changed or if it's



reproduced. Maybe it's both. But then what happens? What does that doing do, to bring it back to Foucault – so what does doing it that way do? What is the ultimate effect of that? Is the ultimate effect that we've introduced a wedge from which we can do other work or have we been co-opted? I really don't know.

Fatima: I think, honestly, it's...I don't know if there is an answer to the question, out there, in general, because it's, on the one hand, especially compared to EDI work, I would say decolonisation in higher education as it is now is, let's say, a more recent trend. It's not as... at least in terms of time, it's not as established as EDI work, so we don't know yet how...it might be co-opted once it becomes more and more trendy, let's say. And I think, in a way, it would require, to be co-opted, it would require maybe different ways of co-opting it because it is a bit more radical, so you need different tools to control it. Yeah. But it's a very interesting question. I don't think...I wouldn't know how I would answer it.

Pasi: Put it this way: if there's a badge that universities start competing for on decolonising the curriculum that involves a bureaucratic process and committees, as there is for EDI work, I think we've failed. To me, that sounds like a failure rather than success. Other people might disagree.

Fatima: I definitely agree, and I think...I really like how you explained the relationship between EDI and decolonisation because I often struggle, when talking about this, trying to explain that I'm not against EDI work, I'm not...or it's this message that "Well, do you mean you don't want more diverse spaces or a more inclusive culture?" Of course, we want that, but it's still different. So, it's a very...yeah, it's a very important question to me personally because I feel like it's...we deal with it a lot in our work.

Pasi: Yeah, I think there's kind of... I think what is important to [add], in some sense, is the idea that EDI work is somehow inherently progressive. I think it's very important that we have now the government that we do because it...I think, in some sense, the current government and the work it does, it's very important for antiracism, for example, because we can see that all kinds of people can be absolutely horrific. You're not a better person, in any shape or form, just because you come from a particular background – and that's important. And, at the same time, it's also important for us to have these horrific people everywhere [laughing], like in... It would be even worse if we started then kind of deploying some kind of racist discourses to get rid of certain people in the government and thinking that that's somehow a solution. It's not. The important thing to do is to realise that the solution doesn't lie there. That's the thing. So, EDI work in itself is not a solution. EDI work accomplishes its own task, and that has its own inherent value, but it doesn't make the



world a better place necessarily in the way that we imagine. It makes the world a different place, and that's valuable in itself, just different.

Fatima: Well, I do have one final question for you which we like to always wrap up with: what's something you'd like to see develop in higher education, maybe in the next 10 years, something you dream of?

Pasi: Revolution [laughing]. No, revolution, the next revolution, if it comes, is not going to come from universities. Gone are the days of 1968 where there was some kind of an intellectual cadre in universities that could imagine the world in a different way. We don't those people in universities anymore – not in the kind of...again, I'm talking about the kind of general [map]. I'm hopeful there are pockets, pockets of...not resistance, I'm not interested in resistance... Resistance is still implicated by power. It's in relation to it. But I'm hoping that, in the next 10 years, we can develop some pockets of...of doing otherwise in higher education, in various shapes and forms, be it research or teaching or knowledge transfer projects or impacts, settings where something is genuinely different from how it used to be. That's probably what keeps me going and coming back. As I said, at the beginning of this, when you asked about the educational background, I didn't have to come back to academia; I was permanently employed, I had a... I would now be much more financially comfortable had I continued doing that work that I was doing, but the...faint possibility of...of...things being otherwise is...what brought me back and what keeps me coming back and keeps me tolerating all the...things about academia that I do not like. So, if, in the next 10 years, we manage to do something, even a little bit, otherwise, that would be good.

Fatima: Thank you so much, Pasi. This has been a wonderful time, and I'm sure our listeners will have a lot of thoughts and insights from the things you shared. Thank you so much.

Pasi: Thank you, Fatima.

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