

Anamika Misra (AM): If we look at the notion of the creation of disability, and race, through especially the lens of the Transatlantic slave trade, where so much of your value, as, uh, you know, as an *object* as the objectification of Black people, within that system, was dependent on your physical attributes. So the creation of disability then as being inextricable from capital value, but if you are disabled, if you are incapable of carrying out your "functions", that were deemed to be within this sort of, you know, capitalist inhumane frame, you are automatically "less than".

Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan (SMK) Salaams, Peace, and blessings, you're listening to Breaking Binaries Season Two, with me, your host, Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan. Known online as @thebrownhijabi. As a society, we're obsessed with explaining our world through the use of straightforward opposing categories. So good or bad, moderate or radical, pretty or ugly, victim or villain The list goes on. All these sets of binaries, though, tend to be quite superficial, and they hide the real complexities, the politics and the nuances of how we've been encouraged to think, following from the conversations of season one, every episode this series, I'll be sitting down with a different friend to break down, break apart and interrogate a different binary and see how doing so helps us think more critically about ourselves and our world, and therefore, how we transform it.

For this episode, I sat down with my friend Anamika Misra, she's an autistic PhD researcher and assistant lecturer at Kent law school. She's previously been involved in the decolonizing the curriculum project at Kent, and she organizes with precarious staff and students of color across a range of social justice issues.

She says, although she's supposed to have academic expertise in the law of armed conflict and human rights, she finds the language of expertise problematic and prefers to say that she's interested in learning about race, colonialism, disability, sexuality, and gender. As you can imagine, with all those interests, we had a really interesting conversation. I hope you enjoy this episode.

SMK I'm really excited this week to introduce Anamika to my podcast. So hi Anamika, how are you?

AM I'm good, just, you know, chilling out, taking some time off from doing work and really excited as well to be on the podcast finally.

SMK That's good. Yeah. I'm very glad to have you. Um, cause today we are going to be breaking down the binary of disability and ability, which I have previously touched on slightly, um, in the podcast on season one where we did healthy and sick as a binary. But I think actually this was something that I wanted to delve further into, but I just didn't really feel necessarily comfortable or confident to do that. So I'm actually really glad for this chance to more rigorously get into this with somebody who is experienced or conversant, at least, in these conversations.

And so before we get into like breaking anything apart, um, I feel like let's approach what it is as it says it is. So in the sense that we're talking about today, um, how have you come across or come to recognize these concepts of ability and disability in your own life or work or experiences?

AM So I am autistic, and I got to know that I was autistic about two years ago, but I feel like a lot of what I experience as an autistic person was kind of peppered across like my life and different forums and kind of was fed back to me, through my interactions with my parents or with like the school

system and stuff like that. But, uh, I think the first time, this kind of like binary of ability and disability became really kind of obvious to me was, and this was before I got diagnosed. Uh, I was going through a period of like generalized anxiety and depression. And I was in my final year of university, like really, really, you know, stressed about finishing properly, getting that scholarship for doing the master's and just really anxious.

And so I went to speak to my academic advisor and, you know, ask him for like, *can I get an extension on this essay, which I have due in a few weeks, I just don't have it in me to, to do this essay right now.* And he goes, um, *Yeah, sure. But like, what's the problem? You seem okay to me, you haven't missed any classes. You know, you seem to be turning up for everything. You even submitted a few things last week. Like if you're going to get an extension, you will need to go to the doctor's and get like a medical report form kind of all of these sorts of things.*

You have to engage with the system. And I found that interaction really strange. And even now thinking back to it, like, I'm sure he didn't have any, the conversation was not like he was not being malicious in that conversation, it wasn't like a put down. For all intents and purposes, it was a very innocuous statement, just "you seem fine to me", even though I was not fine.

And I felt that all of a sudden that all the experiences I've been having, all the difficulties that I've been facing, were not recognizable; were not that important to be recognised. Unless of course I went to the system, got diagnosed for all of these sorts of, you know? Yeah. It almost wasn't real. Yes. It almost wasn't real, but it was so real to me.

And I think that was when, just because I was able to, you know, attend class just because I was able to, you know, turn up for some, uh, events or conferences and doing all of these things, it just seemed like I was fine. I think that's the first time it became really obvious to me. Um,

SMK how, and, and how did that link to you to the, the words or the concepts of ability and disability? Was it that, you know, he was assuming, but you're so able, like you're *able* to do this.

AM Yeah, I think for me, it was in the sense that like, he basically thought that because I was able to do things I could not be having a disability. And I think that really goes to the core of how we actually understand ability and disability, because so much of it becomes this sort of visual way of understanding what is disability and what is ability. And of course the visual way is constructed in a very normative sort of sense. Around, you know, well, you can meet these certain expectations, which are of course tied down to capitalism and race and gender and all of these things, all of these other structures around us that kind of, you know, create our life world.

And of course, we'll be going through that in this discussion that we're having. But it definitely felt that because even if it wasn't like a massive thing, like, you know, capitalism seems like this very massive concept, but if you really bring it down to, let's say I could attend class. Or I could hold down a job and that in itself seems, *Oh, you you're able to function like a normal human being. So clearly you must be okay. And clearly you do not have a disability.*

SMK And that fits with the whole, um, you know, "Fit To Work" thing that the government has that, you know, if your classed as "fit to work", then you should be working. You don't have any, uh, excuse, quote, unquote, I suppose that would count you as being disabled.

And, you know, we've heard stories of people, you know, collapsing and dying in the queue to get their *not* "fit to work" benefit, or, you know, being struggling so much to get there. But then because they present, you know, in whatever ways we assume to be about "oh you're somebody who does not have a disability, you're not disabled", then, that. Yeah, it's this very clear cut, you know, to there's either you can't or you can't.

AM Yeah. And I think with anything that's clear, cut, it ends up, you know, getting rid of a lot of the nuances that exist, and the disabled/abled kind of manner, because I wa- I might, I might be able to do some things, but at the same time might not be, I might be unable to do other things, but that doesn't negate one or the other.

And I think that is the important point in terms of breaking down this binary, because just because someone is able to say, I think that was, it goes down to the conversation on accessibility and stuff, because so much of accessibility becomes that this kind of blanket way of accommodating disabled people.

For instance, if we go to the cinema and you have these sort of screenings, which are, you know, Uh, where the audio is read out to you, or they're, they're friendly for people who have a hearing disability or a sight disability. The way they approach it is a one size fits all kind of situation. So whereas a deaf person might not be able to see or might not be able to hear what's being said, they could see what's happening. So if you have subtitled they've, they could attend a normal screening. But with a person who was visually impaired, or is blind and is not able to see what's happening, they could attend an auditory hearing. In so many ways, one is made available for the other. So this sort of lumping together of different disabilities like this, "Oh, we have this one disability friendly screening", just undoes the different abilities and capacities that people across the spectrum of disability have.

SMK Well, I think, and I think that's such a useful word "spectrum" because it just remembering, when I was growing up and when I'm at school and things like that, it's very clear from the outset that, you know, disability is this one thing that's associated with, for example, a wheelchair. And that's like, that's your, um, quintessential, you know, disabled, uh, person, body. And then, uh, every, everyone and everything else kind of exists on the other side of that.

And there's definitely no scope for spectrum. And I think that's why, also just thinking about school and growing up when you were a kid. you know, you're just taking in all these narratives. You're not necessarily thinking about them too critically. And I think that's why anybody who sort of fell within a spectrum, which has sort of everyone else, if you weren't able, I think to present in a particularly high functioning way, and you weren't necessarily quote unquote high achiever, then it was also sort of this problem of like, well, either you're weird or there's something wrong with you, something off with you. And I think that's when we then go and start ground of like all these slurs as well, around different words, I suppose, used to kind of talk about people who, who weren't able to meet this criteria that is enforced as a norm, but clearly isn't.

Um, but I guess also, like it's not something that I really had to think about that deeply as somebody who, who is and was categorized as able-bodied, as neuro-typical, um, And I think disability was in that sense, something that was also framed as like, "Oh, thank God." Like that's a disadvantage that like, I just, you know, wouldn't, you know, that's something you shouldn't want. It's something that you should want to be very far from, um, something to be overcome and avoided basically. And is that, does that characterization of that resonate with you as well?

AM Yeah, that characterization actually resonates with me quite well and especially, I think it becomes a lot more of, an issue the stigma that's attached to it. When we look at our own communities, the communities of color, right?

Because there's also all of these notions that come with being disabled in some kind of way. I always had that - I don't want to say the privilege, cause it wasn't really a privilege because I was disabled - but I had the privilege of not being seen as disabled. Right? Because for all intents and purposes I did

fine at school. I used to play sport. I used to do all of those things, but I did significantly suffer in a lot of different things. And that's where this language of "high functioning" and "low functioning" also comes in because often, and I really hate this high functioning/low functioning binary, because as someone who is often identified as a high-functioning person, it essentially erased any difficulties I was having.

But at the same time, it presented people who couldn't function in the same way as me as less than me. And because they were so called low-functioning. So the way, often-times when it comes to like autism, people who have, who are nonverbal, who have speech difficulties, will be categorized as low functioning because they can't communicate effectively.

But that that's just wrong because. For all intents and purposes, they have different registers, of functioning than me in different attributes. And so I remember when I, when I discovered that I was autistic and I was attending an autism support group at university, and to me, it was explained that, you know, high functioning, low functioning, all of these things, it's basically part of a spectrum and understanding, that's why we need to do away with this kind of language of high functioning and low functioning, because the attributes I may have, like for instance, I am a high functioning verbal person. I'm, I'm hyper verbal. I really like talking, but I could be low functioning in different instances, which is sort of, you know, social communication and nonverbal communication, because I'm really poor at it. And whereas it could be different for other people who could be very high functioning in, say, cognitive skills, but could be so called low functioning in their verbal skills.

SMK So it just flattens out those kinds of nuances?

AM Yeah it just flattens out those nuances and, what is a formal, helpful way to understand this would be something like, ah, kind of like those circular kind of pie chart kind of things, as opposed to like a linear, you know, spectrum of just like on one end is the high functioning on the other end is the low functioning.

SMK And I think also whenever you have something like that, like high and low functioning, it does implicitly at least carry like a value judgment, like, you know, to be high functioning, is definitely going to be rewarded more than being low functioning and socially rewarded, economically rewarded, or, you know, in all those senses.

So I guess it's quite clear already that this binary, uh, is not only problematic, but that it's hiding things. Um, and that it's constructed. And, uh, you know, I know actually the, you know, that the terms themselves have been under so much scrutiny and, and lots of people are not happy with even the assumptions kind of in the words themselves.

So to begin, I guess. Uh, how can we start to unpick this? Um, and what would you say is, is maybe just as a starting point, what is the central issue? Um, with the assumption that ability and disability are opposites?

AM So I think the central issue, which places, ability and disability as opposites and of themselves is this particular construction that exists of ability: So someone who is able to participate, eh, you know, uh, in capitalism; is able to go ahead and work; is able to communicate effectively, whatever that means. And is able to fall into, for all intents and purposes, the way we understand in a very kind of loaded sense of the word "normal". I think the word normal is I think it's important here, it's significant here because whatever is considered to be able body is the norm is it is the norm, right? And if we are disabled and if we don't fit that norm, we essentially get pigeonholed into this category of "disabled", a lot of that, and, you know, coming to the diagnostic manual, all of these

things, which of course that is an issue in of itself also being historically inaccurate in the sense that it presents, for instance, being, you know, gay was often seen as a mental illness. Why? Because it didn't meet a normative idea of heteronormativity or of being a trans person was considered a mental illness. Why? Because it didn't meet again, the normative idea of gender. And how much of a role normativity plays in creating what is not the norm, and hence the "disabled" is the biggest issue over here because it places, people who might have different experiences form yours as the opposite to you, and as somehow bad or somehow less than human than you.

Because I remember, uh, at university, when I, when I started meeting more and more people who were autistic, who had like, who had different disabilities, there was a person who was a voice hearer, and they would, you know, hear voices and they wanted to start a voice hearing society for other voice hearers. And the first time that they went to the student union to talk about it, it was, it was awful for them because people in the student union essentially looked at them as if they were crazy. And no one wants that because you're trying to create a supportive community for other people who are already experiencing the stigma because they are not the norm.

And then to be stigmatized in even creating that space only just reinforces that stigma further. And why? Because they have sensory experiences that are different from what are considered normative, sensory experiences.

SMK And I think also- I think it's interesting what you said about, um, you know, not only are you kind of, not the norm, but in not being the norm, you're considered less human, less valuable, um, and I think there's something in what you were saying about kind of the stigma that's attached that - and I think this occurs, I would say almost every binary that we've explored in this podcast and that could be probably , could be explored ever - which is, I think, there's a projection that happens by people who are able to occupy the more advantageous - and I say that in terms of like socially and economically rewarded - position.

So if you're not considered disabled, then I think that, or, you don't consider yourself to be, then I think there's also an element of kind of revulsion that comes more from a place of wanting to distance yourself from the possibility of being in that category or being near to that category of disabled because you recognize that, a) to be that would make you less human. It would make you less valuable. But b) also that this isn't a binary. And actually, if we were to, um, kind of look more closely than all of us would kind of have to question a little bit what it is that it means to be human, in fact, per se, like, what does it mean to inhabit the world? But what does it mean when we know that like, there is no real, like one universal good, quote unquote "person" or body to be in and inhabit. And that, to me, links to what you were saying earlier.

And I wanted to maybe ask you about, more specifically, to do with race. Because at the same time that race was being constructed during this period of enlightenment thinking, colonisation, race was very much also about the body and how these different types of bodies that are less "able" than the white European body and not just body, but mind and just broadly like ability. And so does, does that mean that, you know, is there an argument here also about disability/ability being formed as part of a white supremacist colonizing, uh, mission and, and does seeing it in that way, help us in any way, would you say?

AM I think that is absolutely true. And I wish I had some sort of like literature to like drop right now because there is so much fantastic literature that has been written on this. But, uh, one of the best kind of, I think spaces to look for this would be the Harriet Tubman Collective (<https://harriettubmancollective.tumblr.com/> and @HTCSolidarity on Twitter), they have, Uh, so they have this document, which is basically disability

solidarity. (<https://harriettubmancollective.tumblr.com/post/150415348273/disability-solidarity-completing-the-vision-for>)

It came around at the time, that the first call for the vision for black lives for the black lives matter movement started around 2016. And they essentially critique the original sort of black lives matter statement for not having space for disabled folks in it and taking the origins of disability down to the origins of race - like, of course, that, that makes sense. That implicitly makes sense because the project of the creation of race in itself is a eugenicist project. So of course it makes sense that the creation of disability, as well as a eugenicist project.

SMK Can you just explain what that might mean for anyone who doesn't know what you mean when you say race is a eugenicist project?

AM So in the sense that the selection of certain genetic types as being far more superior or far better, as compared to other. If we look at the notion of the creation of disability, and race, through especially the lens of the transatlantic slave trade, where so much of your value as, uh, you know, as an "object", as the objectification of black people within that system was dependent on your physical attributes. So the creation of disability then as being inextricable from capital value. But if you are disabled, if you are incapable, of carrying out your "functions" that were deemed to be within this sort of, you know, capitalist inhumane frame, you're automatically *less than*. But that of course also then translates into, and I think this is one of the biggest issues when it comes to the way we understand disability and ability as these like bio-essentialist, biocentric ways of understanding it as if something is just something that's inhabited within the body and not something that is experienced by us socially and informed by our structurally and socially.

Because the higher proportion of disability will be found within populations that are socially marginalized because of the fact that they do not have the security, the economic security, the social security, to be able to live in a risk-free environment. To put it mildly. So for instance, people with disability are twice as likely to be living in poverty because poverty also operates as a cause and consequence of disability, it causes disability, but also because you are disabled, you cannot escape poverty. But also how people who have, you know, neurodivergent, uh, differences and, uh, being far more present within the sort of carceral system. So they're, they're incarcerated at higher rates, not just within the prison system, but also within the juvenile system, within the mental health system, et cetera, et cetera, but also in a far more sort of diagnostic kind of way.

So the reason that most women, but also specifically women of color and non-binary folks of color, and also sometimes men of color sometimes end up being diagnosed with neurodivergent differences a lot later is because diagnostic tools were developed with the normative white man in mind. This is a very big issue when it comes to women and girls and non-binary folk being diagnosed with autism. There's a reason why the greater population of women who are autistic are diagnosed much later in their lives. Like I was diagnosed at the age of 22.

SMK That's really interesting. So there's also like, um, so within this as well, it sounds like there's like, uh, there's the "right kind of" disabled person and there's the wrong, many different, wrong kinds of disabled people or people with disabilities. And, uh, I think also within that, just, I was just reflecting on some of the examples you're giving. You know, that sounds like then also disability is criminalized that it's something that you will experience punitive measures for having, or being, um, or experiencing. And that also, I think, yeah, I think from what you were saying it is important, I suppose, to recognize like the connection between race and disability, but also to recognize that, uh, although ability is racialized, like disabled people of color are going to have very specific experiences

because at that intersection basically. Yeah I just wondered if you had anything to say on that before I kind of move into the next question.

AM I think one other thing, which I wanted to say on that was that a lot of times when we talk about disability, we somehow don't focus on chronic health conditions a lot. And, but also this whole binary of invisibility and visibility as well, which we kind of like talked about in the beginning, but going back to the chronic health conditions thing, that is again important in the context of racialization, because people who are racialized, uh, not just, uh, racialized as brown and Black people, for instance, first nation people. Often they will experience greater rates of disability and greater rates of chronic health problems due to the neglecting of their community. There's a neglecting of geographically where they're based, but also historically, so if we think back to the poisoning of water, the poisoning of food, all of these sorts of things, the greater rates of employment of Black. brown, and, you know, in the context of Canada and the US, of first nation people in precarious employment and the stresses that places on our bodies and how the precipitates into higher incidences of heart diseases of cancer, of, you know, musculoskeletal diseases.

And if we are to better understand, especially given where we are right now, at this intersection of a global pandemic, but also the pandemic of racism that has existed for so long and understand how we can, you know, think of a world where healthcare and health is accessible to everyone, not in the accessibility that we understand to disability, but accessibility as a thing of being human of how can we all be complete humans through that?

It is important that the language of how we understand disability extends far beyond the sort of biocentric way and into acknowledging that there are middle areas, there are gray areas and there's so many different ways that disability has not even been thought of yet that exists. That can be thought of.

SMK That's really helpful because I think there's sort of two key things that made me think about. One is that I think a lot of the ways that disability and ability are talked about, or kind of introduced to people is it's a very individualized notion. There's also that whole thing of, "Oh, people who quote unquote overcome a disability." And this kind of notion of like, despite my quote unquote barriers. And I think that's something that, for me anyway, for a long time hid this idea of like this being structurally caused and structurally, uh, made worse as well. And I think so what you're saying about, um, you know, this historic element of kind of what happens if you deprive neglect and violate and kind of inflict violence upon people for centuries, but then continue to.

It just made me think as well about how, um, a friend of mine was telling me that, during this pandemic, I didn't know exactly where they were speaking about specifically, but, and this is like within Europe, by the way - like in intensive care units, like a hospital bed, um, kind of being preserved or prioritize for people who are on a scale of 1 to 10, there's this notion of like, um, "fragility". And so it was like, if you're lower down, there's like more chance of you quote unquote living - not quote unquote on living the quote unquote was on "more chance of you living"! - so, um, what he was saying was just that, you know, this inherently means that if you have a disability, you're going to be seen as already a body that is "fragile", and therefore a body that is, is always more close to death.

And I think there's something about the closeness of death and disability that is what makes it something that's so stigmatized, but also something that is like, this is not something to be supported, quote unquote. And I think, you know, friend of mine who lives in Sweden was talking about how recently assisted living became a thing. Where people could actually, you know, on the

government, um, you know, have assistants who would, uh, you know, enable them to be able to live their lives in the way that they wanted to. And how then, during Coronavirus, when it's become like everybody, including the, you know, able-bodied productive, quote unquote efficient workers, it's like, "Oh, actually we can make space for everybody to be able to work in the ways that they need to be *assisted* at home."

And I think there's just, just something about what you were saying that makes me think about, yeah, this. This is very much also tied to like who we deem to be disposable enough. Like, "it's okay. They can die." And who it's like, "no, you can't die because you're essential to the economy." And I think Coronavirus has brought that so much to the fore and I think.

AM I think that ties back really well to the discussion around like, who is seen as being human in the first place. Right. Because it's also because as much as disability and chronic illness becomes a part of the structural conditions and all of those things are violence also that comes out of the structural conditions. So I'm thinking of specifically, for instance, situations like in Kashmir or in Palestine or also, you know, the very violent responses then comes from the state where people who are marginalized, who are stigmatized because of the fact that they are marginalized people within a particular space are then maimed or injured in this kind of way. And that's where I think. So I'm thinking of Jasbir Puar's book, *Right to Maim*, which essentially makes this point that how the state utilizes the space between injury and death, where you know, where closeness to death is that final kind of assault on your life and how the creation of this population that can then be injured or maimed at will is this creation of a population that is in surplus to the economy. That you know, whose existence, is a necessity for capitalism, for neo-imperialism, colonialism to keep existing. So people who already by definition of the fact that they're marginalized are already regarded as you know, less than human or even non-human, depending on the period of history you're in, are then further sort of injured or maimed and rendered even more disposable. And with Coronavirus, of course, that was disabled people, but also people who are racialised.

So for instance, taxi drivers, for instance, you know, uh, workers who are essential workers, but also workers in care workers, uh, who work in the hotel industry, who work in the service industry, who disproportionately are people of color. And what does it mean that people of color who already experienced precarity, because of the fact that they're racialized are rendered to even more precarity, because, because of this particular virus, but all the other, you know disablement, or the other kind of maiming that can happen on them?

And so I think understanding disability like patriarchy, like white supremacy, like heteronormativity, all of these things as an underlying aspect of the structure, of this sort of your colonial, uh, hell, that we live in that we exist in. That is something that also needs to go. That needs to be a part of our fight for collective liberation.

SMK Yeah. Cause I think you've made it very clear, you know, that this is a construct ability/disability and it, you know, everything you've just said is basically what is hidden and obscured by this - and that would be my usual question at this point. So instead I want to ask you kind of, I think hopefully more fruitfully for people who are listening and for myself. You know, what you've just said there, I think is a really crucial point. In a lot of these episodes with people we're trying to imagine different futures, we're trying to imagine futures where there is justice, where people can live more livable lives, um, where people are, you know, um, free from violence free to be, to be safe.

And I think what you just touched on there, it's very clear that many of these visions still maintain the disposability of those that are deemed to be disabled. And I think also just wanted to ask you as

well, actually, maybe before I get into that, like the, the language of disabled, um, I know that some people will kind of problematize this and say that, you know, in of itself, it presumes that rather than it being about society, it doesn't talk about the society that *disables*, it is just like the body that is disabled or the person that is disabled.

AM I find that as an interesting actually- because I do agree with that because even though I identify as a disabled person, I identify as a disabled person because I have been disabled by the structures. Right. And it's not that I am not, I don't have agency to react against it. In fact, my continued existence, even though I'm disabled day in and day out is a manifestation of that agency.

SMK Yeah, that's true. I think actually that was first introduced to me like that concept in a way, that, for me, at least was just quite a vivid way of, um, exemplifying it. So somebody was just saying if, if everywhere in the world was like, um, wheelchair accessible, um, we wouldn't think of being in a wheelchair as a disability because the society has not made, it has not disabled or like made that like something that means you can't access, you know, safety, wellness, et cetera. Um, and I think. There's obviously scope for that on so many different levels and scales. And so then suddenly the question becomes like, you know, can we almost like, can we make disability as a category obsolete? In a sense - not in a problematic sense of disposing of that. And obviously like for people who, for whom that's like actually a, um, something they politically organize around, that's not what I mean, but I just mean in the sense that if we were able to build a society that doesn't disable anybody, that actually enables everybody to access wellness, freedom, safety.

And I guess this links to what I was trying to say earlier, like what could you offer or suggest for people who are trying to envision those futures that also makes sure we don't continue to reinforce that marginalization of people who are disabled and experiencing disabilities. Like is there, you know, you've made it very clear, there's so many connections, but is there something that you think is clearly missing in the organizing that we do often around building this future?

AM I think, I think a lot of the organizing on, so I'm not trying to be critical of people who are organizing around this because of course being proud of, you know, having a disability where you're stigmatized in this kind of way that, "Oh, you know, you are less than because you have a disability" and then faced with as being like, "no", like, you know, "I'm proud of who I am, even though I have a disability", or, "I'm part of who I am, because I have a disability" and celebrating our disability. Of course, those are important. And this idea of celebrating yourself. But I feel like that is very much an organizational idea that comes out of this sort of very neoliberal way of how we just understand the world where it's all about the self. "Oh, I'm proud of myself in my own capacity", in my own kind of you know, I'm going to celebrate myself and this whole like self care kind and wellness kind of thing.

SMK it also seems to fit that model of, you know, "I'm a good one". Like, I mean, I won't speak over that, but I think in an example, when you're talking about race, or you're talking about Muslims, I know there's that whole "be the good one", you know, "get a seat at the table" and "I've overcome" quote, unquote, those, those barriers.

AM Yeah. And yeah. And that forms such, I think that forms such a large part of what a lot of disability organizing unfortunately is, and also a lot of disability organizing, unfortunately, is a very white space. Because it has only been on, I think it speaks more to my lack of knowledge as compared to a lack of these collectives, is that I did not know that there were collectives that were, you know, led by Black people and other people of color who were organizing around, uh, around disability. So I recently came across Black Disability Collective, and I've learned so much from them. And I think the way racialized people, people of color, we approach the issue of disability because of the fact that we already sit at the intersections of a multiple identities. We already understand that

our response to this has to be structured response. It cannot be a response that is about our individualized, you know, only about disability, not about anything else. And so I feel like a better way of approaching this would be something would be looking at disability through the lens of precarity.

So. And this is not a new thing that I'm saying. I think so Jasbir Puar has said this, uh, other people of color have said this, those who are working in disability, kind of disability studies as a field, and also, uh, first nation people and other indigenous people have all said this, where we understand our populations, which are already marginalized, as already experiencing a kind of *disablement* from the systems and understanding that due to our precarity, we are even more likely to experience what we understand as biocentric disability and hence organizing, not just abolishing this binary of disability and ability, but abolishing the systems that make us precarious in the first place.

And I think that as a way to organize around these structural systems that render us as of less value is, is in my opinion, a far better way of organizing ourselves because so much of the violence that is experienced by people who are disabled gets lost in the sort of celebration and this pride around disability.

SMK Just like thinking, uh, about spaces as well, where, you know, particularly over the, you know, 2020, conversations around abolition. Um, I do feel like at least, and again, this is, I, I liked what you said about kind of "probably reflects more to do with my knowledge, um, than what's actually happening". But I think in the mainstream conversations around abolitionism, if such a thing can be said to be a thing, um, There's definitely not a lot of space to think about, for example, like psychiatric wards as places of imprisonment, or like where policing and punitive measures are happening to people.

And I think that has been useful for me where people have helped me make those connections because, if I, I often talk about, you know, safety being really central to kind of the world I want to build. I think it's impossible for me to talk about safety uh, if I'm not then doing, I guess ,what, you know, bell hooks talks about, "centering the margins", and I think this for me is just another way of imagining a much more robust vision of a safe future in a future where people are free from the violence of the state, um, and other kinds of violence, which I think stem from that. So. That's really helpful.

And I think it's clear that this is not, I think something that can sometimes happen with the way I've seen disability spoken about in an intersectional framework is that it's like an add-on. So it's like, "Oh, and a disability". Um, and it sounds like from what you've said, that, you know, I mean, you've made it very clear that this is inextricably linked to everything that everybody is experiencing all the time and every other kind of social construction of, uh, our experiences, but more than anything that it's actually maybe a way for us to hold the mirror up to the state and think about like an institutions and think about how, what role they play in making our lives more precarious. And I think that that what you said about precarity was, was really useful.

Um, I think you've kind of answered the final question I usually ask, like "what's a better way of thinking about this" and I just wondered, like, do you have any concluding thoughts or is there anything that you want to-

AM I think, I think the overarching sort of concluding thought I would have is, and this is there's something which has come to my mind because I've been seeing a lot of like, able-bodied neuro-typical friends of mine to sort of going on about, you know, like, "Oh my God, I can't believe 2020 has been wasted." And this kind of just like, because they've had to stay at home because they can't

meet their friends, they can't participate in social activities and just go on with their life as normal, oh you know the - "I'm just like, I'm just so sick of this. Like I just want to be outside 2020, it's wasted." It just always irritates me and kind of hurts me a little bit because as someone who for multiple reasons - disability being one of the bigger ones - can't always interact with the world on her own terms. It makes me feel, in an implicit way, it's being said that my life has been wasted because I haven't been able to engage with all of these cool things out there in the world, which I can't access all the time.

And you know, and this whole thing of just like, "Oh, you know, we will see each other once 2020 is over, we'll see each other ones as coronavirus, pandemic is over." It reminded me of something that Azeezat had said in a piece that she had written as being someone who is, you know, with a chronic illness going through, and is vulnerable in this coronavirus time, it just sort of, this kind of dialogue of just like "when we'll see each other, once coronavirus is over", "I've wasted my life" and "my life has been wasted". "My year has been wasted because of coronavirus" sort of is a narrative which comes out of an absolute lack of empathy with the experiences so many of us are constantly facing because, yes, we would love to, you know, be able to engage with the world as well in the way that you know, able-bodied neuro-typical people can. And also we would love to meet our friends once Coronavirus is over, but presuming that you can do it when we can make those presumptions, because we don't know how this particular virus is going to affect us in itself - I don't want to use the word privilege - but in a way it is a privilege because it, because you are, you are secure in that knowledge that you're going to exist through this.

And I think my sort of takeaway would be in that sense, that to sort reform the way we think about these things and have more empathy with people and not really think of time as time that is wasted or time that you need to, you just needs to get over because so many of us are living with this time all the time. So having a bit more empathy, having a bit more kind of understanding about how people are operating in different registers to this crisis, but also not expecting a normal because. What you consider as your normal has always been violent to us.

SMK Maybe even like beyond the empathy. I think it's something it's something other than that, because it's kind of like, saying that, you know, "Oh, like I've been doing quote unquote nothing." "My time is wasted". I think it also implicitly you're giving consent to that former way of living that did mean, as you said that like, you know, for lots of people. Uh, life was not just unsafe, but like unlivable for many people. And I think you're right, you know, this idea of going back to, or "a new normal" or whatever, it does, it does still rest on that.

And so I think it's, yeah, it's something beyond just like a lack of empathy, but a kind of, I think just a centering of like a very certain type of experience as the one that really matters. And it's okay that many people will continue to have, um, you know, a life where they're not able to access the outdoors because, well, you know, it's not me and they, they are disposable. Anyway. I think that's what. That's what that for me, yeah, brings up.

AM No you have phrased that better than I could have because I was having like brain fog, but no, yeah, that exactly is what it is. And that instead of wanting to return back to how things were, or trying to establish some kind of new normal, which, you know, gives us like piecemeal kind of, uh, what's the word, *reasonable adjustments* - that they really like to use, when it comes to like people who had disabilities. And so instead of of giving us like piecemeal reasonable adjustments, why don't we try to reframe the way we even think about what should be normal? So, yeah.

SMK Can I ask you, an imagination based question cause I've been enjoying kind of investing some time into like, what would it, you know if we could imagine alternative futures and um, you know,

some of the questions, like I was part of a really exciting conversation around, like, if you can imagine a decolonized education system and it's 2030, what does that look like? And these kinds of things. And so I guess just to help us visualize as listeners as well bit, um, if you, uh, you know, woke up tomorrow in a world in which sort of, the socio-economic political changes had been made that that kind of would mean that this binary no longer exists, that it's kind of almost been abolished. Could you imagine, or even begin to maybe just walk us through what a day in that world could look like, or just like some of the things that you, or stand out to you and you think this has to be in that world, or this has to not be in that world?

AM So on a, on a less serious note, I would really hope that sirens on like loud things don't exist. That's just, it that's just a, that's just a personal sensory kind of thing. No, but in a more on a kind of like a serious sort of sense, like. I think it would just, it would just mean that I wouldn't have to explain my experiences to people, and so many of us won't have to explain our experiences and that we wouldn't be stigmatized or even just sort of, you know, it's not even about the stigma just, we would be seen as human enough to be able to make the choices that we want to, that we know work best for us, because so much of the sort of disability carceral complex takes away the ability for us to make those choices that we know work for us. And yeah, I think that's what it would be. But this question is quite, has made it quite obvious to me that I haven't thought that far-

SMK No, but we never got a chance to be honest, like who's given you the opportunity to invest that time? I think it's something that none of us really fully to do, but I think what you actually said that the most - it's probably one of the most helpful things, which is that trusting that people know what they best need for their lives to be livable. And I think that's true across so many different forms of violence, oppression, and imperialism, whatever. Um, but particularly perhaps when it comes to this binary where I think there's also this presumption that, um, people know what is best for disabled people.

So yeah, I actually, I found that really, really helpful. And I think for me, that's, there's a lot that I will take from this, but perhaps, you know, as somebody who is able-bodied and who doesn't experience disabilities, I think just particularly this notion of centering and listening to voices of people who, who are not in my position and who I can therefore learn from.

So thank you so much. Um, if there's anything else that you want to add, like, please go ahead, but otherwise thank you.

AM No, this was great. Thank you so much. I just wanted to give out, give a shout out to the Black Disability Collective (@BlackDisability on Twitter), Autistic Tyla (<https://open.spotify.com/show/7vSXpOLW1ieKzkMHnM2hIm?si=3efSVNgPQQqa0KyvMcTLWA>) and Chloe and Annette of Aucademy (<https://www.facebook.com/Aucademy/>) who helped me figure out that I was autistic. Um, yeah and I think these three sort of like digital sources have been so helpful to me, but have also been a space of community for me to actually learn, to unlearn and know more about just, you know, because I think all of us go up with internalized ableism, regardless of being disabled, not being disabled. And I think it's just interacting with these different spaces has really kind of helped.

SMK Thank you for listening to this episode of Breaking Binaries. I hope you, like me, can take something from our guest this week. Look out for episodes fortnightly and if you enjoy, please share. The music you've been hearing is made by an old high school friend, that came through, so shoutout to Violence Jack at @getviolencejack online. Thanks to all my guests for chatting to me every week and helping us to think a little more critically, and I hope, humbly, about our world.

I do believe that part of the way we transform the world is by transforming the ways we think about it. Thank you for listening. I've been your host, Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan, bye!