Breaking Binaries – with Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan, Transcript (from www.suhaiymah.com)

Season 2, Episode 5: British Empire/British Nation with Nadine El-Enany 02.01.2021

Nadine El-Enany (NEE): Actually, I don't think that Britain did become a nation state, um, after the end of, uh, of empire, not only because it had colonies, but because it went from empire, there was some overlap with its membership of the European union. So it actually just became a member of a transnational organization, and it's actually only now, in the wake of the referendum on Britain's membership of the European union, that we're seeing Britain kind of struggling – to put it mildly – with the question of what it is as a nation state, you know what it would mean for Britain to- and it's not pretty as we can see.

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.

This week's episode is a bonus episode. I really wanted to get it out in time for the new year, despite the usual fortnightly releases, because it really is a conversation that as much as it's damning and an indictment of Britain and reminds us of how overwhelmingly racist this society we live in is, it's also greatly helpful conversation and a reminder that it really matters what we call things, and we have the power to rename, and that language in of itself is a form and a tool of empowerment.

So the conversation I had was with Nadine El-Enany, Nadine is an amazing scholar. She is a Reader in Law at Birkbeck School of Law, and she's the co-director of the Center for Research on Race and Law. She teaches and researches in the field of migration and refugee law, European union law, protest, and criminal justice. She has written for the Guardian, the LRB blog, Pluto blog, Verso blog, Open Democracy, Media Diversified, Left Foot Forward, and Critical Legal Thinking. And her book, ***(B)ordering Britain: Law, Race and Empire*** was published by Manchester university press last year. And it's this book about bordering Britain that we really focused on in this episode. I really hope you enjoy it. And I look forward to hearing how it was.

SMK Hi, Nadine. So lovely to have you on season two. How are you doing today?

NEE I'm good. Thank you. Thanks for having me.

SMK No, no, that's alright, thanks for your patience with this. We're having some technical issues for any listeners. So, I'm just going to jump straight into it in today. We're going to be looking at the binary of Britain as a nation and Britain as an empire.

And I think maybe to help everybody and get us on the same page, it would be interesting to know the space you're coming from. So maybe the work that you've done before or what it was that initially made you even interested in the question of what Britain is.

NEE Yeah. So I've always been interested in the question of racism. Um, I guess personally my own experience growing up in Britain in a very white part of the country in the Southwest, um, meant that I experienced racism, um, and also was always aware of my parents - or became increasingly aware of my parents' - difference and our difference and how that sort of impacted on our lives and the way we were seen. And so I became interested in yeah, the question of migration of movement of racism, and I've been sort of studying that, and, you know, in an academic sense, I've also been engaged, um, politically in an activist sense on that question. And yeah, I did my PhD research on refugee law, on questions of immigration, uh, in terms of looking at Britain in Europe and, and then this book is, you know, I guess a product of that work, but, a very different product in its endpoint, you know, than it was in its doctoral.

SMK That's really interesting. That's interesting because I think when most people, most of us, when we think about Britain, we don't necessarily like have that legislative framework to think through it. We don't think about like what Britain has kind of said about itself through law. And I guess in a way that's a bit, um, probably a bad way of putting what, some of what your book does. Um, but I guess to, to help unpack that and, and to think about that, maybe a good beginning to breaking down this binary and thinking about the themes in your book, is for us to think about the way that these two concepts are presented to us more generally, because obviously there's this story that we have about Britain having formerly been an empire - that's ended and now Britain is a nation. And so I just wondered if you could tell us a bit about how that binary is presented, um, and you know, how these two entities are framed as opposites.

NEE Yeah. Well it's exactly, as you say, um, the, the given story is that Britain was an empire. There was British colonialism, and now that's over. That's something in the past and today, uh, Britain is simply a small Island, a nation state. Um, and that's, you know, you can contrast that with, with, uh, with another binary between this kind of. colonialism that's over that ended, and the settler colonial context, which is kind of accepted, um, as being, uh, an ongoing situation of colonialism - because of course there are indigenous peoples who continue to make claims, um, on land that was stolen from them. So those kinds of situations, um, at least in critical scholarship are understood as ongoing colonial situations. Whereas Britain is definitely not one of those. Colonialism something in the past it's now over Britain is a nation state.

And you know, as you'll know, from the book, the book really looks into how law plays a role in, um, actually demarcating that exact binary, and really building the mythology around that binary, that colonialism is something in the past and Britain is just, just a nation state now.

SMK Sure that's really, and that's really helpful because I think even, you know, you've talked a bit about *you* growing up and I think when *I* was growing up there was a reason there was a kind of, um, part of my own experience made me think that this binary didn't make so much sense because for me to be in this country as the grandchild of Pakistani immigrants, um, you know, the only reason they were here in the first place was because there was this connection between this island and, you know, South Asia. So I think it's very clear, you know, that there are questions to be raised.

So for us to begin to raise those questions, um, you know, how can we start to unpick this binary? Um, you've already mentioned the law, is that perhaps the best way in, or what is the central, um, kind of assumption that we can begin to, to, to use, to unpack this binary and this and the demarcation of nation, and empire, or the split between empire ending, and nation beginning.

NEE Yeah. I mean, there are lots of ways in, um, you know, a basic study of history would be a way in! You know, um, just sort of understanding how Britain came to be the wealthy sort of plentiful place that it is. Um, but you can't answer that question without, Looking into its colonial history and seeing, where its wealth came from: transatlantic, slavery, colonialism. So, you know, there's, there's obviously a historical excavation that could be done and indeed has been done, um, into presenting counter narrative to that one of "Britain was empire and is now a nation state".

Of course for me, my way in, um, is law. I'm, you know, I'm legally trained. I'm a legal academic and I think a lot about how law shapes the way we see the world in a way that I think a lot of people, um, who maybe aren't thinking in legal terms and studying law and teaching law, maybe don't think about that so much. Law tends to be thought about as something that kind of falls from the sky and is this neutral objective fair thing that we can just rely on for, for good things like justice and security and rights and safety and that, there's no question that if the law says something, then that's the right answer. And you know, a lot of law is taught in that way. You know, you come into the classroom and most law schools will teach law as "here's the law". You know, "don't question where it comes from, its social context, its historical context, is political context. And then here's a fact scenario. And then you apply that law to fact scenario.

And you know, I think people in their everyday lives when we're thinking about the context of immigration, there's a lot of talk about "illegal migrants" - people who are here illegally, people that don't have a right to be here. And that kind of language is invoked in the media and official discourse and is obviously, um, widespread in the public, discourse around, uh, who has a right to be here and who doesn't.

So you see the laws invoked in these really, um, sort of unquestioning ways, and so I guess, I think it is important to approach the question of "Britain was empire and is now nation state" by looking at how law reinforces that incorrect and mythological, um, narrative. And I can talk about that a bit.

SMK Yeah. Cause I think that's one of the things that I found most interesting about your book is this, this piece of legislation in 1981, especially, and I wanted, yeah. You go ahead and tell us.

NEE Yes. Um, so yeah, I do think that in order to get to the breaking of that binary and to kind of think about, challenging the notion that, you know, empire is past and, uh, nation state is now is to, to think about, how law has played a role in constructing a Britain that seems like a legitimately boarded sovereign nation state.

And so to do that, you do need to go back to the 60s, 70s, 80s, at a time when the British empire was facing a lot of defeats, in its colonies, independence movements were, driving British authorities and British forces off their territories. So Britain was essentially losing, was being defeated, in the colonies. And of course, it was aware that it had a lot to lose in terms of its political influence over the world, it's global power, and it was looking elsewhere for riches. So it was looking towards Europe and thinking, "okay, you know, maybe that's where wealth and power lies". And up until the sixties, Britain had avoided passing any kind of restrictive immigration legislation that would target racialised Commonwealth citizens and colony subjects. And it was doing that because it wanted to maintain the myth that Britain was an empire that was based on notions of unity and equality. Of course, if it passed legislation that was racially exclusionary, it would be very clear that that was a myth.

Of course it was a myth because the British empire was, totally built on an the idea and a practice of white supremacy. Um, but, the myth, the lie had to be maintained in order to keep the stability of the empire to keep it strong. But, in the sixties and seventies, legislation was eventually passed in, in the face of the defeat of the empire.

The 1971 immigration act was passed, which made whiteness, key to British identity because it invented this concept called patriality. Um, and it said the only patrials - those born in Britain or the parent born in Britain - had a right of abode, which means a right of entry and stay in Britain. It was a completely invented concept. And of course, if we think about what was going on in 1971, statistically, a person born in Britain was 98% likely to be white. So you can see that the effect of that legislation was to target racialised Commonwealth and colony citizens, even though it didn't say in the law, "this is about keeping racialised people out", but clearly it was about that.

And then that legislation culminated in the 1981 British nationality act, that I think you just mentioned, which, really did sort of raise for the first time, this idea of Britain as a post-imperial territorially defined nation state, um, and actually severed Britain geographically for the first time, a kind of notionally white Britain, geographically severed from its colonies and the Commonwealth.

And it did that by building British citizenship, the concept of British citizenship for the first time. It was a concept of citizenship based on that concept of patriality that I just talked about that was invented for the 1971 act. And basically it tied citizenship to the right of entry and stay in Britain and actually the conservative home secretary at the time, William Whitelaw, he said of the act that "it's time to dispose of the lingering notion that Britain is somehow a haven for all those countries we used to rule." So it was really clear that that was the idea behind this legislation to kind of build Britain as legitimately, bordered, sovereign, nation state, and sort of erase this history of empire.

And you know, what I say about that act is that it wasn't just, it didn't have this sort of, um, neat effect of actually ending colonialism because of course Britain still had colonies. It still has colonies today. Um, but what it did do was, was of very symbolic importance, um, by kind of saying, "Oh, Britain is now this self-constructed nation state, empire is over." And what that did is send the signal that Britain, the landmass and everything within it, belongs to people, British people, who are understood as being white because of the way that the concept of patriality operated and that that's actually an act of theft - the legislation itself, kind of by pulling up that drawbridge and kind of, um, you know, very clearly demarcating Britain as this post-imperial postcolonial space, you know, meant everything that Britain plundered was then understood as belonging to white, British people and erased was any kind of connection of where that wealth might have come from and who, and who is actually still entitled to having it back.

SMK That's so fascinating because I think when we hear narratives now about, you know, "let's keep Britain white" or, you know, "make Britain white again" or whatever it may be, I think there's no sense that - there's a sense that that is coming from a really fringe, you know, extreme kind of, um, right wing view. But what I think you expose through this kind of looking at it through the law is that, actually, this is so embedded from a very mainstream state level that this idea of keeping Britain, white, or, you know, making Britain, white, as you've shown, not keeping it, is actually something that's really like so normal, so commonplace, it's central to that imagining.

But then I'm also surprised in the sense that, you know, that comes so recently, 1981 is not very long ago at all. You know, it's within many people's living memory very recently. And I wonder, was it simply the numbers of, of people of color that were kind of coming to live in Britain at that time that was the issue or why is it in that moment that this becomes really important to demarcate?

NEE it becomes important because, um, Britain was weighing up it's, you know, it's, it was cutting it's losses. It was thinking, "look, the empire is on the back foot. Now we're being defeated", but that's not the story that they're going to tell. Of course, the story that we ended up hearing is that, independence was given, you know, over to populations who had been civilized through a process of colonialism. But I think Britain could see that its position was weak and that, and of course, in a, in the context within Britain, having had a Britain that was an empire that's whole existence was predicated on this notion of white, British supremacy - of course, when racialized people began to arrive in Britain, they experienced a lot of racism. There was a lot of, um, resentment and hatred. The white British population were taught to, had been taught to see these people as their possessions, as their possessions abroad. And then here they are coming and sort of, you know, behaving like human beings, um, and getting jobs and working and passing you in the street.

I mean, you know, that was quite the jump to make, for people, and I think, the shameful thing is that officials did absolutely nothing to try to explain to the population that migration is positive or that, um, you know, or to sort of just hold onto the lie of empire that everybody's equal in the motherland, um, you know, instead as we know, racial hatred was stoked opportunistically, um, by officials who expressed their own sort of fears that they were going to be - you know, that what happened in the US was going to happen here and then we're going to be race riots. There was a total lack of understanding amongst British politicians in that period about why racism took place. Um, that, of course, if you have a whole system of rule that is predicated on white supremacy, if you teach an entire population that they are superior because of the color of their skin and that they can, that Britain can occupy and colonize and steal and subjugate and enslave, because people are racially inferior because of the color of their skin. Of course, when racialized people begin to arrive in Britain, there's going to be tension. But there's no, that was all exploited and stoked up, um, by politicians.

And in terms of the timing of that, of the, of the passing of that legislation, as I say, I think it was, retaliation in the wake of the defeat of empire. It became, um, less worth it to, to have a situation where people were able to move freely. And the other thing that is important to point out is that in 1948 and another important piece of legislation in 1948 is the British Nationality Act. That piece of legislation rolled out a status called "citizenship of the United Kingdom and colonies" and it was, it was the Windrush could arrive because of that legislation. People could come and work in Britain , because they had a right to, under that legislation, but that legislation was not an immigration measure. It was not about facilitating migration to Britain. In fact, when it was passed, there wasn't even a sense - and you can see this when you go through Hansard - all the discussions in parliament at the time, there wasn't even a sense that anybody might arrive as a result of that legislation.

The legislation was part of the movement was outward, everybody was white, British people were moving to other parts of the colonies to settle in the settler colonies. Um, there was no movement coming to Britain, very little movement coming to Britain at that time. It didn't even occur to parliamentarians that this might happen if this piece of legislation was passed. That legislation was passed because Canada was making moves towards, um, passing its own legislation, defining its own Canadian citizenship separate from a notion of British subjecthood. It wouldn't derive from allegiance to the crown and this was very worrying for Britain because at that time, the empire was very, very important to Britain economically and so it wanted to send a strong signal that the empire was, was good and strong, and that this was a way of doing it by rolling out the status, but then movement was outward.

And then, and then of course, when you look at Hansard and parliamentary, Um, parliamentary

discussions around the time this legislation immigration legislation was passed, that did prevent people from coming. Um, you know, it's talked about at the time, "Oh, well, we couldn't imagine a situation at that time that, you know, people would actually come". And when the, when the Windrush did arrive, politicians were shocked. Officials were completely shocked and they didn't know what to do. And they, short of passing legislation at the time to prevent that movement, they did do everything they possibly could to stop people from coming, you know, putting pressure on, the governments of the colonies and Commonwealth countries, where people coming from, um, trying to stop, trying to get them to stop the movement at source.

They discouraged people from be able to come. They left them, neglected people, or they didn't give them access to housing and rights, etc. They wouldn't pass race or anti-discrimination legislation because they didn't want people to come. And they even, there was even this kind of very, uh, dodgy thinking, about trying to send people to Africa, um, where they're sort of "technically officially" first come from, even though of course, they traveled from the West Indies at that time. And then there was this kind of, um, "well, you know, due to difficult psychological, uh, issues, we may not be able to do that", which seems like a clumsy kind of reference maybe to slavery? I mean, it's very weird, but it's just, but there were these kinds of, um, desperate efforts and attempts. And trying to think through how to stop this movement.

SMK That's amazing because I think this, this idea that it's a sort of "unforeseen consequence", you know, our presence here is an unforeseen consequence or something that was never imagined does, I think what that really speaks to as well, as I sense, from what you're saying, there's this real entitlement as well, that these kinds of legislators and politicians had about having, not even the capacity to imagine that those who they had, you know, the countries they've occupied the peoples that they've had dominion over; could imagine that they actually did have some relationship to this Island, is really interesting.

And it kind of, it makes me think about the broader entitlement that you speak about throughout the book, which I think is also linked to the idea that, you know, we can go extract all this wealth, we can go kind of collect all these resources, steal all this labor, whatever it is. And still not imagine those people have any rights to it. And you actually, I just wanted to quote a little, um, fact, I suppose, from your introduction, that is really fascinating. I think where you say that "in 1833, when Britain abolished slavery, um, it raised the modern day equivalent of 17 billion pounds through taxation and loans to pay compensation to British slave owners for the loss of their quote unquote property."

And you said that "this compensation scheme was the largest state-sponsored payout in British history until the bank bailouts of 2008", which is sort of just like beyond, you know, I can't even think that that, to think about that and to even have that fact said aloud, you know, it goes against this entire narrative of benevolence. And then what you say even more interestingly is that those funds, that, you know, that were given to those slave-owners are now to this day infused in Britain's commerce, you know, cultural, Imperial and political institutions. And I think that connection, you know, which is really important in your whole book is, is really at the heart of this as well, because that entitlement that you're talking about there, this notion that, you know, what on earth are they doing coming here? And yet at the same time, the entire infrastructure of what makes Britain, Britain being built on the back of that empire. And I wonder if I could just ask you to talk a bit about that monetary angle, you know, capitalism seems to be at the heart of this?

NEE Yeah, it is. For me, it's a really important point to dwell on because just going back also to your earlier question around, um, how the situation of colonialism and then post-colonial was presented,

um, usually the most people will go to - in terms of having a discussion around lingering imperial questions around return of stolen, colonial wealth - will be, you know, what's in the British museum and what should be returned. So that tends to be the limit of the discussion.

Reparations of course are talked about, but that's always talked about as something radical, that's you know, but again, even the discussion around reparations can and does take place and thinking, "well, colonialism is something that happened in the past. How do we pay back for that past?" It doesn't actually recognize the sort of ongoing colonial configuration of Britain and how actually, what people access and take for granted every day in Britain, things like health care system, welfare state, transportation, relative security, education, cultural institutions, you know, all of these things, uh, can be understood and should be understood as stolen colonial wealth, and there should be questions around who is entitled to access them. Um, and not just a question of, you know, what's in the British museum that could be returned, um, to places where, where they were stolen from. And so it's about broadening out the way we think and conceptualize and understand, you know, what is stolen, colonial wealth.

And yeah, as you say, it's, um, it infuses the, the economic system that we have in this country. And. It's, you know, Britain's whole industrialisation and the growth of its capitalist economy is embedded in and is a direct result of colonialism. And when we can think about how colonialism worked, you know, India had to pay Britain for the export of its own products to Britain, for example. So of course India's economy was always depreciating, whilst Britain's economy was always growing and India's economy didn't start growing until after colonialism ended. I mean, it seems like such an obvious point to make. And yet, the mainstream argument that we hear is, well, you know, "the railways", you know, "Britain gave so much to India" and you just think India didn't have a growing economy! And that's just the basic measure we talk about in terms of, um, what are the prospects for a country is you look at its economy, you look at it's growth, and that might be wrong in and of itself - once you have that kind of economic focus on kind of understanding of the world, but that is such a basic thing that's taken for granted. And yet. Despite that the power of the narrative around Britain having done some kind of favor to its colonies is, is the dominant one that still gets the most air time. And so that's, you know, that's an important point.

And then I think that the other thing to mention is that, um, you know, there was so much exploited labor in the course of colonialism. The working class was basically made up predominantly of racialized people. And that's not understood either, you know, there's this sense that, um, You know, the working class is actually conceptualized and understood as something that's white and British, but actually Britain's working class historically is not, it's not only disproportionately made up of racialised people today here in Britain, but also has throughout all time been made up of racialised people. And then of course, if we think of, um, racial capitalism and the global economy as being what Britain depends on today through kind of neo-colonial structures, which of course are not about direct control, but may be about corporate control of the economies of developed countries and unequal trade and debt arrangements; we can still see how Britain continues to benefit off the back of exploiting racialised labour. Again, that's of course a legacy of colonialism.

SMK It is astounding really, because I think when you say it so clearly, you know, it's sort of ridiculous that there could be any other narrative. And I think, I guess what I'm wondering here is like, Britain doesn't seem to be, it can't be formulated outside of empire. There is no Britain without empire is what you're essentially saying, and, and then that makes me ask, you know, with all these binaries, the really important question I think is, less about how they're incorrect, but what they function to do. So what, having this idea of British empire having ended and turned into this nation, what the function of that is.

And I guess the function of that is kind of exposed when we think about just how dangerous, I suppose, or how threatening it is for you to say what you're saying, which is that Britain cannot be configured outside of empire. And I wonder what you think is the sort of, you know, what is the radical possibility there, or like what, what is threatened when you say that and what does it mean to try to think beyond, or to try to take, you know, try to take Britain as actually this, this construct of, of empire that is both continuous and global, what is it that you think this binary really serves to do today? Because it's clear what it *has* done, in the sense of like justifying empire and these really violent relationships and this stolen wealth-

NEE I mean, um, I mean first, the first thing to say, would be to say, actually, I don't think that, Britain did become a nation state, after the end of empire. Not only because they had colonies, but because it went from empire, there was some overlap with its membership of the European union; so it actually just became, a member of a transnational organization.
And it's actually only now in the wake of the referendum, on Britain's membership of the European Union that we're seeing Britain kind of struggling, to put it mildly, with the question of what it is as a nation state, you know, what it would mean for Britain to- and it's not pretty as we can see.

So it's only really now, and I suppose, so I suppose it's an open question as to what it's going to look like as a nation state, um, it's not looking good, it's not good, which does, of course raise the question of, you know, if you put together my point about, you know, really Britain's up for grabs in terms of what's here, it does raise the question of, well, what is it? And of course you and I both know that James Trafford's just written a book kind of where he sort of brings about the end of the concept and place of Britain through this kind of critique of, um, of Britain. If we sort of accept that it is a colonially configured space, then, you know, what is the meaning of it? And I think he looks at this really well and you know, you and I both have both endorsed his book. So I definitely recommend people read that (*The Empire at Home: Internal Colonies and the End of Britain* by James Trafford).

But I think the question is important in terms of today, because it's not just the question of Britain being, um, remaining colonially configured is not just a question of kind of writing this mythological history around, um, the becoming of Britain, as a nation state and actually making the case that what's within Britain should be accessible to people who are termed things like, uh, "irregularised migrants", people who apparently ostensibly don't have a right to be here. You know, my argument is that they do, but it's also that we can see the everyday violence - imperial violence - ongoing.

I mean, we just have to look at the Grenfell Tower fire or the Windrush scandal or deaths in police custody, um, disproportionate stop and search, you know, all of the ways militarised forms of policing being, um, targeted at racialised people. We look at the Prevent program, we look at so-called humanitarian intervention, imperial wars, I mean, we can, you know, this sort of colonial configuration of Britain is, is, is very much alive, which means the death of, um, racialised people who are, who remain subjugated in so many ways. And that's empire, you know, that's ongoing, that's lingering Imperial rule in many ways. And so I think that's why it's so important to make that really clear.

SMK Yeah. And I think, you know, as you say, the only, the kind of obvious conclusion is that the more exciting question is almost, you know, what, what comes after Britain, right?
Like, is there a possibility of, because I think what you raised earlier was really interesting that it's not an easily solvable kind of situation, where as you say, you can pay out reparations and all injustice is sort of dealt with. And I think this raises really important questions around conversations to do with abolition and even, you know, transformative justice or what it would look like to kind of, um, repair harms that have occurred both historically and presently, I suppose.

I wonder if you have any thoughts about that because, you know, the case is well made, right? You've, you've made the case really strongly. And the question now seems to me, you know, how do we, how do we dismantle Britain? You know, how do we-

NEE I think, I think this question for me, it's really difficult. Those kinds of questions get very difficult for me. Like the question of dismantling Britain. I'd love to see it, but I don't, I don't know how you do that without dismantling the whole nation state system for, for example, um, without challenging deeply, as Sivamohan Valluvan does, for example, in his book, *The Clamour of Nationalism*, which I would very much recommend, um, you know, the whole notion of nationalism, there's so much that needs dismantling, imaginatively.

Through imaginative uses of language and in thinking about our practices of resistance, I think before we get to a question of abolition and how to practically abolish things, at least that's how I feel, is that we're not there yet in terms of our imagining, because I think that's the other thing that colonialism stole from us is psyches, is dreams, is what we imagined ourselves to be; what we desire. What we can even think is so limited by the way in which our world is structured along lines of race, racial hierarchies and inequality, and white supremacy and privilege, you know, all of those things limit our ability to imagine and to organize.

So there seems to me that there can be so much we can do for each other and with each other, in terms of relating to each other. There are things that maybe are not controlled by the state that would maybe help us towards making new tools that would then allow a kind of dismantling to occur. And so, I mean, I know it sounds so small, but things like conversation is important. Relating is important, kind of being in touch with pain that we experience in our individual lives and bodies and then being able to empathise with other people who experienced pain in their lives and understanding how pain takes place on an individual level, but within a system, which is structured to produce pain and in differentiated ways of course, but, but really for all of us. And then, and then I think if we can start there, we might be able to actually formulate a kind of politics that would be radical in being collective and coalitional and solidaristic and internationalist and anti-imperialist and anti-racist, and I just, it's just, we're not there yet where we have that kind of collective struggle that is not based on a kind of - on the very same horror we see outside of our, you know, things like a zero sum kind of understanding of resources - then becomes a kind of zero sum politics in, in organizing.

You know, if *your* oppression is recognised before *my* oppression, then, you know, my oppression is threatened. So there's a lot of investment actually in victimhood, which I think we need to address together so that we can kind of share practices and share language and share our political energies in a way that can really make us work together, really help us to work together.

SMK Definitely. No, I think that's such actually a really beautiful kind of set of questions that you've raised there because, you know, I think in, in a sense, you know, even the purpose of this podcast is to have conversations that maybe lead us to a different type of understanding and the way that you, you have put there and I think, you know, perhaps I am with you in the sense that maybe we're not quite there yet to know exactly what it is we even want to build if we're building another world.

But I think it's really interesting, to hear you talk also about kind of, the very like embodied reality as well of, being in this world and experiencing the pain and the traumas that you talked about. Because I think on the one hand, of course there is what we've mentioned, you know, the legislative and the economic aspects of this kind of, uh, this colonial violence. But I suppose the thing that is much harder to think about is, you know, how, what healing actually looks like, what it actually looks

like for, for people to be well, um, communally, emotionally, physically. And I think it is important to think about those things. And I'm really appreciative actually that you, you raised that as a really valid kind of journey and, and things for us to be thinking about, because I reckon that with the, kind of, with the, sometimes with thinking about these really, what can become very abstract notions, of like white supremacy and racism, it's easy to fall into sort of, I don't know, quick fix, responses.

And I think what you said as well also about, you know, this almost kind of "competing oppressions" type of way of discussing things, I think what it also does is hide - you know, what you mentioned at the very beginning, when I asked you actually, why you were interested in this question of Britain, you said it's because you've experienced *racism* - and I think that's the connection that's essential, right? Because, you know, I think oftentimes many of our conversations hide a bigger form of white supremacy that I feel personally is really like, you know, with many of these binaries that we've dissected over the months, almost two years now, it's like at the heart of everything, you know, there is this European white supremacy that kind of is just a monster that like erases and eradicates and kind of disguises itself in all these different types of binaries. And I suppose that feels like that's the place, you know, that's the thing that underpins these things. So whether we're talking about Britain or we're talking about nation-states in general, or we're talking about different types of belonging, I suppose it's also about our attachment to that or our investment in that.

And I guess, I don't know if this is something you can answer, but I'm wondering if that also is one of the reasons why people also hold on so much to, you know, Britishness as an identity. And I mean that both in the sense of, so to give you an example of what I'm talking about, you know, after, Shamima Begum had her citizenship stripped, I noticed amongst a lot of other Muslim people or people of color in general, I think it felt more important for some people to hold onto a notion of their *own* Britishness in the wake of that, I think to kind of distance the prospect that this could ever happen to *us*. Right? Like you kind of Other that person to distance that violence from *you*, but on the other hand, as well, you have this notion that, you know, certain people can and can't meet Britishness, I guess I'm trying to figure out why is that this becomes such an important conversation or is it simply a distraction or is it simply to do with, you know, the rights that genuinely do materially benefit your life if you are granted that citizenship and that being quite a valid thing to need and require? I don't know if I can just throw that jumble of scrambled thoughts at you-

NEE It is. And it's a huge part of the book as you know, um, the question of recognition, um, because it's one of the things that is so complex about the law. It's not only the thing that. Borders and prevents entry and is the obstruction to people moving. It's also the thing that you then have to appeal to, to get, to get a status. And you're not going to get rights unless you have a status. You're not going to get the right to stay unless you have safety. So everybody understandably wants status. And of course the be all and end all of that, the best status to have would be in theory, British citizenship, and that's becoming more and more the case as we've seen.

Actually prior to, I would say the referendum, you could have a number of statuses and be secure in Britain. You know, there are all sorts of reasons for maybe not wanting to have British citizenship, it might relate to a question around your nationality. It might relate to a political thing. It might relate to cost of applying for that. You know, there's all kinds of reasons. You might just be happy with your citizenship status, for example, but we really saw this ratification, this kind of fetishising of British citizenship come to the fore. As we see Britain kind of in this moment of transition from an EU member state to so-called nation, state Britishness suddenly becomes much more important.

And then coupled with that, you had this, you had the hostile environment, the claim being made that certain people weren't British, didn't have a right to stay in Britain. Um, you had a vast increase in the number of, or the use of citizenship deprivation laws. And of course you were talking about

the case of Shamima Begum, and that also then sort of brings to the fore, the importance of being British. And I discuss also a case, um, the *Ruppiah case*, which I'm not going to go into here, where basically the question, what it means to have a precarious status was decided by the courts. And essentially that pushed us again towards, you know, basically, unless you have an indefinite leave to remain, um, you're you're on a non precarious status. And the ramifications of that are huge because, um, if you are threatened with deportation or removal, um, and you've, you've built a family while you're on a precarious status, you, you know, you don't have much hope and relying on article eight and the right to, to, to private family life. If you're trying to then make a case, "well I have these family and close connections here, and please may I stay?"

So, um, So, yeah, to get back the question of recognition, by kind of appealing to the British state and saying, you know, "I meet the criteria, please give me the status". That civilising logic, that imperial civilising logic, where the British state decides whether you have permission to access stolen, colonial wealth and whether you're civilized enough to be granted British citizenship, as you know, there's the "good character test". You know, people have to have their finances in orders or all kinds of things that really sort of suggest if you are "wild and unkempt", if you are a *savage* and you're not going to be given British citizenship, if you behave in a way that is, "disloyal" or can be deemed to be disloyal, even if you were a child in the case of Shamima Begum, for instance, you know, then you, you lose your, you lose the great honour that it is as a Brown person to be a British citizen.

So I think we've seen lots of things happening together that pushed British citizenship to the kind of fore as being like the best thing to have. And I suppose, I would want us as activists to be wary of that way in which appealing to citizenship. And so, for example, in the wake of the Windrush scandal, a lot of scholars and activists kind of said, "Oh, these people are protected because they're British citizens." But, it's like, well, what happens to people who are not British citizens or who don't meet that criteria or who have had it deprived, um, who are irregularised, um, you know, what happens to them? If you're making the argument that you need to be a certain *kind* of racialised being in this country in order to be deserving of access to the basic means of life.

SMK Yeah and I think that feeds into, you know, all those other binaries around good and bad immigrants and people of color and all the performance that is required to simply, you know, access this thing that safety is capitalised under. So I guess, so the question that I usually bring up near the end of the podcast then is around, you know, if this binary isn't helpful, isn't even legitimate. Um, as it clearly isn't, what would you suggest as maybe another set of questions perhaps that you think we should ask when we come across this binary? Or is that, um, you know, is there something really important that we should hold in our minds?

I suppose you have already given us a lot of things, whether that's just simply, you know, really querying this notion of the end of empire at any point, or whether it's actually keeping a focus on what is the material wealth of Britain and where it came from. Uh, originally I think when you were saying earlier about the welfare state itself and education and transport, you know, these are, you know, British empire hidden in plain sight, right? That's not really any conversations that I think we have very often, so, again, if I can just throw that to you, what's a better way for anybody who's listening to this podcast, who's kind of had this, this binary demolished perhaps for the first time, but for many people, I'm sure, you know, in just a more rigorous way than they thought about before, what can we, what can we be doing instead? How can, how can we try to move towards that more collective, you know, understanding that that can bring us to somewhere?

NEE Yeah. I mean, I guess I would go back to the question of language because it's so y to the question binaries and thinking about binaries. I mean, if we're thinking about law, it really works on

the basis of categorising and categorising is all about, you know, who falls inside the category and who falls outside. So there are so many binaries in the way that law operates and you get, um, lines drawn everywhere. So who is deserving and who is undeserving gets decided through immigration law. If you meet this criteria, you're deserving. If you don't meet the criteria and not deserving. So those are the kinds of binaries that I would want to challenge; the question of illegal and legal, because actually if we break down, if we, if we take, if we take the story that I've told about the making of modern Britain, then Britain, isn't this legitimately boarded sovereign nation state, but it is the spoils of empire. Colonialism hasn't ended. It's ongoing. And that just means we can change everything.

You know, Britain no longer gets known as a "host state", um, as a "refugee protecting state", uh, countries which are apparently producing refugees, actually it's Britain, who's producing those refugees because there are refugee situations and conflict situations because of British colonialism. So everything gets turned on on its head and all of the binaries are broken down.

If we actually do this careful historical work and then say, "this is the story". And, and you know, something like irregularised migration can be understood, not as that, but as part of a long history of anti-colonial resistance, for instance. So that's another way in which we change how we think and how we speak about people as being not entitled, as being actually entitled, and not as being here *illegally*, but as being here taking back something that is theirs, that already belongs to them. And it's actually in being illegal that a forcible return takes place - and that is what makes it radical.

So you already get this opening for so many more creative and radical and emancipatory ways of thinking, actually, people who are so-called irregularised migrants, or even just brown and living in Britain or Black living in Britain, get to see themselves as entitled, um, rather than not entitled, as *empowered* rather than grateful. And so all of those kinds of binaries get to be broken down.

SMK No, that's brilliant enough. So, um, pretty galvanizing, I feel quite, I can see I'm just like grinning at the notion of what you're saying. I really love that. And I think anybody who's listening, you know, there's so much, I think even just, even if you don't, if you don't even say these things aloud, I think being able to say them to ourselves, as you said earlier about, you know, colonisation of our own psyches, I think there's something so empowering about - as you say, it reestablishes or reconfigures that your relationships to this place, the space and all of its institutions. Yeah.

NEE It's transformative. It's transformative. And I've seen it. I've seen it when I've spoken, because I've spoken about the book to like college students and they've sort of said, "I finally see where racism comes from and also, I've got right to be here because my ancestors built this country", you know? and I can say, you know, I'm *entitled* and that empowerment you can see on their faces, you can see it because, you know, in the wake of Brexit, especially when, like, you know, everybody was told to go back to where they came from and being white and British was the only thing that was allowed that you were allowed to be, I mean, that level of disenfranchisement on a day-to-day basis, you're bombarded with it in the media all of the time. And then you get it in the street, and then you get it from officials and then people are being deported and it's just, everywhere.

So it is about empowering yourself to think and feel differently because if you start feeling different, you start feeling powerful, you can actually act powerful, too.

SMK Oh Nadine, that's a pretty good place to end the podcast. I think that's such a, yeah, such a hopeful note. And I loved that and I feel like, yeah, it, you know, if we can start thinking in those ways and we can stop, you know, it's like changing the world. So thank you so much. Really. Thank you for the time.

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!