

In Memory of Aziz 2 | Podcast transcript | Blog summary in English, Spanish and Hindi

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Nisha Thapliyal and Désirée Rochat

Co-hosts Soledad Magnone and Joyeeta Dey

[Soledad] Hello everyone. “In memory of Aziz” expands on his work, and of his fellow scholars and community workers, on the fundamentals of freedom of speech and a path for advocacy within academia. Aziz Choudhury died on the 26th of May of 2021. He was an activist, educator, and author engaged in radical adult education, non formal learning, and social movements.

We continue our In memory of Aziz series of podcasts and blogs in conversation with Nisha Thapliyal and Désirée Rochat:

Nisha is a Senior Lecturer at the School of Education at the University of Newcastle in Australia. She teaches and does research on social movements for public education, the right to education, activist knowledge production and social movement learning, critical and feminist pedagogies for anti-racism, peace and social justice education.

Désirée is a transdisciplinary scholar and community educator, her work connects historical research, archival preservation and education to document black activism. She is currently a FRQSC postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University.

Thank you Désirée and Nisha! It is such an honour to connect with you to, somehow, continue learning with Aziz. We look forward to knowing more about your experiences with him and perspectives on these important topics.

I'm going to pass the mic to my colleague Joyeeta, who will facilitate conversations.

[Joyeeta] Thank you. I'm jumping right into the conversation then, the first question was in which ways have social movements been instrumental as spaces of non formal education for academics for you in particular and for academics in general? And could you answer this question through a lens of having worked with Aziz?

[Désirée] Do I jump? So I think for me, there are two ways in which, you know, social movements, and I think it's also important to see social movements in broad terms, right? Because I think that one of the things that Aziz focused on was knowledge production in very different ways in different types of social movements. And so paying attention to different forms of community activism, of advocacy work of more, you know,

explicitly political work. And so I think that in that question, I just want to make sure that it's a broad understanding of all the activities and all the actions that are, you know, part of social movements. And so that being said... to the question in which ways have social movements been instrumental as spaces of non formal education?, it means that it's been a range of learning opportunities. And so if I think of, you know, community activism, for instance it's a lot about building relations. So there's the pragmatics of social movements and that there's a kind of theoretical and political understanding that we gain from social movements. And so I think it's always that kind of connection between the two that Aziz was really aware of in talking about knowledge production. So paying attention to the knowledge, the theoretical knowledge that comes out of social movements, and then the more pragmatic knowledge that comes from organizing, right?

Whether it's organizing a campaign around migrant justice, for instance, whether it's organizing within the space of a community organization, which means, you know, doing activities, cultural activities, through the arts, whether it's, waging international campaigns. And so, I know that, for instance, for me, when I came in, and I met Aziz through my masters, right? I walked in at McGill, not really knowing what I was doing there. I had a long term practice as a community worker, and Aziz is the first one that made me reflect on what I had learned through my community work, you know, so all the skills that I had gained from, again, organizing people, organizing activities for youth, gaining a political understanding, and so, through working with him I was able to see, well, I learned, you know, the politics of Montreal by doing this work. I learned the internal politics of community organizing by doing this work, but I also learned how to bring people together. I also learned how to do research to organize campaigns. And so I think that by "a" paying attention to everything that happens within social movement, and then "b" paying attention to different forms of learning that this is where we gain a better understanding of what we actually learn from within the social movements, if that makes sense.

[Nisha] For me, so I had finished my doctoral research with the Landless workers movement in Brazil by the time I met Aziz. And if you know the MST (Movimento Sem Terra), then you know that you don't get to work with them unless it's on their terms. So my education about you know, the kinds of transformative knowledge that can be produced in sites of collective struggle had begun before we met. Earlier in India I didn't have the language to, you know, as you say, I didn't have the language to recognize it. And the time I spent with the MST was this, yeah, was a really intense, critical time. In... of course, acknowledging that knowledge production happened in... counter knowledge production happened, was intrinsic to any kind of mobilizing to try and bring about any kind of social change, but also it was a very strong lesson in the power dynamics and politics of knowledge. That knowledge always comes with power dynamics, however well intentioned, and that is why the MST of course talk about formal educational institutions as 'fences' or barriers to movements, right? Because along with the landlords, you know, the fazenda owners of Brazil, it was the universities and the schools and the education systems that told the landless people of Brazil that they were worth nothing. That they were backward, uneducable, so on and so forth. So for the

MST they had always known that the landless people had their own knowledge? And that's what they went about doing just, you know, formalizing it and compelling recognition and respect for it,? And in all kinds of different ways. So for example, when I read your question the first time, the word non formal stood out for me and it jarred because for the MST these binaries... They actively challenge any of these binaries, right? Formal, non formal, informal. Yeah, so I'd sort of... that's where I was when I was introduced to Aziz and then began to read his work.

And what I took from his work, of course, was reinforcement of some of these critical premises that you know that you always had to be aware of the power that was built into any knowledge making project, even those that claim to liberate, emancipate and so forth. But I think the biggest takeaway for me from Aziz was his emphasis on everyday learning, right? And of course, he was building on people like Griff Foley and you know, people before him who had talked about learning in struggle. So I will just read out the quote, right, that sticks with me from his book "Learning Activism" and don't ask me the page number, I think it's nine,--- "social change is mainly driven by ordinary people consciously organizing, learning, and creating knowledge together to understand the workings of hegemonic power, knowledge, and to take steps to bring about social change". Yes, I think I'll stop there on that one.

[Désirée] And if I may riff, I think you mentioned something that to me is key is like it, you know, he gave you a language in a sense. And so, and to me, that's very clear that this is what Aziz did through his work, always acknowledging that his work builds from others. And so there was this recognition of the collective aspect of knowledge that I think was really key to his work. Analytically, but also in practice, right? He created a space where people could come together. He recognized that he was learning from these people. He puts you in contact with people. And so... For me, what he did is he gave me the tools to understand how knowledge is built, you know, through struggles, informally, incrementally by, you know, by people coming together.

And so this is what allowed me to understand how I learn and how we all learn from movements. And so I think I agree with you that, the kind of the binaries between non formal, informal, formal was, you know, kind of an important, not an important but it was a good framing to understand it, but I think by starting from knowledge, you kind of go at it from a different way, right? Because you recognize that knowledge crosses all actions, all moments, all kinds of interactions that people can have through social movements, through working together. And so if you start from the premise that knowledge is always being shared, produced, critiqued, pushed against, as you say, with the question of power, then you also recognize that learning is happening throughout, right?

Because of this knowledge that's constant. And so I think it's a different point of entry that to start from the knowledge itself, then to start just from kind of the learning. And I think that this is one of really the key takeaways for me from Aziz's work which is to understand that kind of power of knowledge, power in knowledge, knowledge and power as a constant.

[Nisha] Yeah, and if I can riff back, and he was also really strong on his critique of how knowledge could be used to co-opt and to control. So your question about, you know, how the academy particularly, the settler corporate Northern Academy, its relationship with movements, whether whether it's their own First Nations movements or, immigrant movements, anti racist movements in their own spaces or around the world, Azoz was scathing and also hysterically funny in, how he could just take the contradictions and inconsistencies in these relationships apart, right? The pretense, the hypocrisy, the insistence on originality [of research], which then completely individualizes how we think about learning and knowledge. , I think for me, it was in everything that he did, ?

Not just the way he did research, but the way he taught, right? The fact that he was so generous. He would share syllabuses. I would say, okay, "I need that", you know, I sent him an email saying, okay, "I want to teach about this. What do you recommend?" And, you know, and a syllabus would come along and it would include everything from punk metal to, you know, a Brown standup comic to, you know, to political art. Embodied to me what it meant to challenge hierarchies of knowledge, right, which is what the university is built on, whether we like it or not.

[Joyeeta] Sort of drawing on what both of you did mention, this even more explicitly, that you said doing this sort of work has a cost. Would you expand on what you mean by that?

[Désirée] Absolutely. Well, it actually kind of builds off of what Nisha just said, because I think by starting from the premise of, of recognizing that knowledge happens in different places, happens in different ways, is recorded and captured, meaning, you know, documents or pamphlets or leaflets. That's what I'm saying here in different ways that people bring kind of different knowledges to the table. This is something that he also tried to kind of incorporate in his classes, right? And so that means that it was like trying to think of different ways to engage us as students with a variety of materials, with a variety of readings, with also a variety of learning experiences. You know, for instance of one of the classes that I took with him had a it wasn't an internship. That's it it was a non, you know, non slash informal learning experience that we had to do. And so I think that that means, so for instance, from the pedagogy side, that he went the extra mile to reflect that diversity of learning opportunities and to bring, to really also dismantle the hierarchies of knowledge that he was kind of fighting against in his classes. It also meant, in the way that he was working, to continue this literally this community organizing work. So building bridges, bringing people together, organizing events, so that, you know, he could kind of leverage some of the resources that he had access to bring people into the same room.

And so that I think in terms of cost, I think that also means that it's an extra added layer of labor, right? That also needs to be acknowledged. It's a relational labor because trying to keep in touch with people across the globe to be able to connect them and make sure that you're aware of what's going on you know, literally from point "a" to point "b", making sure that you provide your students with a variety of learning experiences, a

variety of knowledge opportunities. That means that you're thinking about your curriculum more deeply, that you're trying to go the extra mile to provide this variety of learning experiences, this variety of sources. And then in another way, it's also trying to buffer a space for students that had a path like Aziz, you know, and so I'm going to build on my own experience.

As I said, I walked into the masters, not really, you know, being sure where I fit in because I was a community organizing community educator for 20 years in Montreal. I never found anything that looked like what I was actually doing on the ground. So I kind of stumbled on this master's that was something around educational studies and not so sure, not so clear. And then, you know, Aziz was the first person that recognized the work that I was doing and that recognized what I was, where I was at, what I was bringing in and why I wasn't fitting in any program at university.

And so he made sure that I was able to anchor, you know, from my research projects in his class, that I was able to anchor that in my actual practice to, eventually my PhD. And I had never had the intention of doing a PhD, never, ever. And Aziz and I did an individual reading course because he proposed that, you know, I should be able to do the readings that I wanted to do, right? And so that's the first, also him, when I say him opening spaces for students like us, recognizing that we weren't getting the education that we wanted. And so he would go the extra amount and say, well, would you do a reading course that also benefits you, right? And that reading course eventually, you know, evolved into something else.

And when we finished that, I'll always remember, he said, you know, I think you should think of doing a PhD because I think you should use the PhD as a space to reflect on your work. And I laughed, I very openly laughed at him. I was like, Aziz, I think you're, you're not right. I'm not doing this. But then, you know, it kind of sank in and I said, well, I'm never going to do this, but if I'm going to do this, he's the only person that I know would understand what I'm trying to do. And that I know would let me literally do what I want to do, which is to remain anchored in the community sector. And I think one of the challenges for someone like Aziz was also that he, as I said, he created that buffer for us, which means that, he let me kind of do what I wanted to do, but also provided resources and understood that, you know, I didn't want to remain anchored in the department, but he had to be remain, he had to be in the department, right? And so creating a different space within a structure that is so toxic, as we know some universities can be, that has a cost. The... as I say, trying to create a different curriculum that has a labor cost, you know? So, yeah, maybe I'll leave it to Nisha, I'll let you kind of riff off from that, but I think.

[Nisha] Thank you. Yeah, I think the word labor, is sticking with me from what heard you say Désirée. I remember Aziz telling me, you know, about the edited books that he put together. Y you've just described so eloquently how much, we can't even imagine how much labor he performed with so much love and care that it takes, right? Because he didn't just work with... what's the word conventional successful academics. Look who

he was writing with, And so the work that would have gone into, you know, completing those projects. But the story he told me was how every time one of those books would come out, how he would, you know, go to the UK every year, and then his friends would invite him to, you know, almost every campus. But, he had almost no institutional support to disseminate this incredibly important work. And so the story he would tell me was about lugging boxes of books on and off trains, because that's how he got around England. Sleeping on people's couches and, you know, and then he would do a talk and then he'd get back on the train with his boxes of books and go on to the next campus, right? And I mean, I think that's just, I think the least of the labor and the cost that we're talking about. And of course, he loved it, he talked about it as something he loved to do. But you know, all of that, I think, takes a cost. The affective cost also as you touched upon. The fact that this work is not only not recognized and valued in the corporate university today, because it doesn't easily quantify into the KPIs, that drive everything from funding to, you know, to performance review, to promotion... But just collegiality and community, right? Because there was just no space at most academic conferences for what he wanted to talk about, who he wanted to be in conversation with,? And so he had to then perform the work of creating, making that space for himself and again, obviously, there were rewards to it because he did it and he did it all the time. He benefits were, of course, someone would ask him a question like I'm struggling with something like this, or how do I navigate, or how do I publish on this topic, and he would have this enormous network and this vast reservoir of knowledge. And a group of people who believed in exchanging knowledge rather than hoarding it and, you know, putting their stamp on it.

[Désirée] Absolutely. I love that you're bringing this up because I do think that connecting people was “a”, one of his major skills, but also “b”, one of the things that he enjoyed a lot. And that kind of weave, I always see community organizing as a form of weaving, you know? And you know, Aziz, we used to laugh a lot about his artistic skills. He loved art, he was so creative. I know he's skilled in a lot of things. Art wasn't necessarily, arts and crafts wasn't necessarily one of them. I know he'd make jokes sometimes. One time he put something up on his office door that was kind of an artsy thing. And so, yeah, we used to laugh at this. But I do see community organizing as weaving. And I think that Aziz was a really strong weaver. Because he managed to create these bonds between people and to recognize also.

What people could learn from each other. And so that's, you know, Nisha, I like what you're saying. And like, you know, he had this vast network that he could put people in touch with, but that also, so because he paid attention to what everyone was doing and what everyone could bring to each other, “Oh, Dési, you're missing this, I think you should either read the work of this person” or, “Oh!, let me put you in touch with this person”. And so that also means that it was very intentional. Right. He wasn't just kind of networking you to network you for, you know, career purposes or for academic purposes. He's always really putting humans in relationship with one another. And so I think that the effective labor that you were talking about is exactly this. It's recognizing what everyone has to gain from and not gain in a capitalist sense, but literally gain on a human sense from being in touch with one another. And you mentioned also the humor,

and I think he did it with a lot and a lot of humor. And to me, Aziz, this humor is one of the ways in which he weaved people together. It's also one of the ways in which he shared his learning, right? Because his jokes always had something about them, right? Whether it was you know, critique of something or whether it was to point to something.

I always say that one of the most useful tools as a PhD student that Aziz shared with me was a phrase generator for academics. And so it's this online thing where you press and it just creates random sentences that sound academic. And the day he shared that with me, I was like, "this is the best, like my, literally my, you know, PhD supervisor at this point is sending this to me to remind me also that, you know, part of what you're doing is a little BS". You just got to know. And then, you know, so I think that this is, yeah, "don't get too caught up in it, Dési, don't be too scared, because you could put a phrase generator in somewhere in there". So I think this is also like trying to also, yeah, kind of bring it back to the essential and be able to laugh even at the process that we were in as we were in it, you know? And so I think that this is also one of the strengths that he brought to the work to be able to kind of, you know, play with it also at some point.

[Nisha] What would he have said about ChatGPT, I wonder?

[Désirée] Oh wow... Yeah!

[Joyeeta] So the next thing is about the role of the university and, and the individual's role within that. So how have academic spaces in the past supported activist research and how it can continue to do so given the sort of growing threats to free speech? And within this, what is the role of the individual and making these spaces more conducive? For such work again, drawing on Aziz's life and how would you think of that question?

[Désirée] I think that one of the main first thing that Aziz did was he redistributed resources. That was very clear that the university provided him access to, you know, financial resources, space resources that he could channel into the movements that he was involved with. And so whether it was through the books, you know, and so as Nisha, you mentioned also the edited books, giving the opportunities for people to write and publish their ideas to make them more accessible, kind of outside their networks. Whether it was organizing symposiums or smaller conferences, whether it was, you know, the first year that I started at McGill, the first two years that I was there, he would organize these lunch bag seminars to bring in people. So I think that really this idea of like using these resources to continue the community organizing and the political work that he was doing that was yeah, one of the main things.

[Nisha] Yeah. I did my PhD and I worked in the US for another seven years, before moving from the US to Australia. I was really shocked by the lack of resources for this kind of work,? You don't need a lot of money, but by the time I got to Australia, they were in their third decade of neoliberal higher education reform. I was used to doing the

same work of seeking out, you know whatever little you could get from the institution to bring voices onto campus and into dialogue with students. And then I wasn't able to do that anymore when I got here, because there was almost no institutional support... but, you know, that wasn't good enough for Aziz I would complain a little bit about how hard it was to do the things I was used to doing when I taught in the US. And it just wasn't good enough because, you know, it was what you said, we're in the institution And what's the point of being in the institution? Where is there space? However small the space might be, what can we do with it? Right? And he did it always with, you know, with humor and with care.

I also got a sense... that even in Canada, that those spaces were closing, that they were narrowing, that things were changing in Canada.... And of course he had, he had lived in Aotearoa, New Zealand, he knew the higher education context on this side of the world very well, and so he was... he was able to help me. This is funny, sitting in Canada and he was breaking the system down here for me to help me read the power structures and again be able to see where the openings were, where the sensitivities were, because, of course, this is a higher education system where First Nations people are still struggling to be seen and heard, right? First Nations knowledge has now, you know, been included, but it's very carefully contained, right? And surveilled and diluted you know. "Another Day in the Colony" is a recent book that sort of speaks to that. Also a book that Aziz put me on to... Samia Khatun's book "Australianama", where she builds on indigenous critiques of Australia's relationship with its settler colonial history and then brings in her standpoint as a South Asian Australian...as a children of South Asian Australian migrant settlers.

[Désirée] Yeah, because I think that you just pointed to something that is in a way related... And the question of free speech is so big. But I think that you spoke about the question of power and I think that this is what Aziz was also very aware of. And this is what he kind of constantly reminded us is that power works in every institution in every collective and so whether it's, you know, from the university to, you know, kind of broader society or even within our movements. And so I think the question of how Aziz would have kind of helped us to understand the question around free speech or some of the debates that are going on in universities is also reading and understanding power in these institutions. You know, what is the power dynamic? Who is embedded in that? You know, what is fueling what decision? But also to keep that critical lens, even in looking at the movements that we are involved in. Because he always talked about that power also in the movements, who is deciding what is emerging out of the movement, which voices are being silenced, which voices are being put to the side. So I think that part of what he saw as the privilege of doing academic work is also to take a step back, to analyze the dynamics of power broadly, but also within the spaces that we're involved with kind of keeping that, you know, attention all the time that it's like power is always at play. Even when we're in progressive movements, even if we're trying to do something that is challenging higher powers, we're still replicating some powers and within the dynamics. And so, to kind of be aware of that and think of practically, what does that mean for the kind of work that we're trying to do?

[Joyeeta] This very directly connects to the next question that we have, because it's a prominent part of the role of the digital within academic work and in activist work, so on the one hand, it empowers to reach and knowledge access, on the other hand, it opens you up to vulnerability and surveillance in unprecedented ways. So again, so if we connect it to the question of free speech how do you think Aziz negotiated this? What are your thoughts as scholars and community workers on this?

[Désirée] I think that it builds from the answer that I just gave, right? Like the question of power was really key to also his understanding of the tools of surveillance in their different ways are ultimately about power, right? And also understanding the connections between the tools of surveillance, if I may say, and I know that this is something that you know, in one of his books, he talks about this and surveillance, so I think that the work of historicizing surveillance practices from governments, international agencies. I think that was core to Aziz's work, understanding how these tools work together. And, and how, and so I, I don't think that he had anything, you know, kind of explicit opinion about the digital world right now because it evolved so fast. But I think that it's clearly, he understood them as a continuation of practices of surveillance. And I think that this is something that he was always kind of trying to remind us in also understanding power is understanding the history of power. And so it's understanding the history of tools of surveillance "a" and how they've constantly been there and "b", how, where they emerge from who they've been surveilling, what are the continuities. And so I think it's that arc that how you say that? That arc that he would have been really careful to make sure that we understand and that we keep this in mind all the time, if I may say.

[Nisha] Your previous panel also had some really funny things to share about Aziz's relationship with technology, right? Like, I have an email from him saying, oh, I've just discovered Netflix, right? And then he had all these jokes about Twitter and how he lurked on Twitter, you know. How he enjoyed lurking, but he wouldn't create an account for himself. And the book of faces and so on. But like you said, he was teaching us through his humor. And I think the question was always not what technology, but why technology? Technology is another form or format of creating knowledge. What questions do we need to ask of it? Is it movement relevant? You know, is the knowledge produced collectively? Is the knowledge counter hegemonic, right? Those were his constant questions... that's what he considered struggle knowledge, right? Those were some of, I think, the defining features of transformative knowledge,? So I think yes, so on technology, there was a lot of humor, and I think that's what he was trying to tell us. What you said, Desiree. Not, you know, all the techno celebratory Rara! Hashtag Arab Spring, hashtag this, hashtag. He certainly was very, funnily cynical, right, about it the revolution will not be televised, tweeted, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, right? It's what people do with technology. And on a personal note the book that he edited on surveillance and the state. Again, I was just struck by how He was bringing one book out a year, and every book was cutting edge. He would manage to find and produce in such a short span of time, these collections of incredibly insightful essays that were asking the questions that needed to be asked. And they were also always incredibly

accessible, right? Because for him, if you, if it couldn't be understood, then what was the point, right? And recently I heard anti caste activists in India, and around the world saying the same thing. Today, at least in South Asia studies, caste has become sexy, right? There are a lot of the people talking about caste, casteism, but activists can't do anything with a lot of that theorizing, right? So, I think for me, the technology question, is about how does it help the movement, right? What can activists do with any information and communication technology and what does it do to human relations? We keep coming back to that, right? How is it transforming our relationships with each other and our relationship with other living beings, you know?

Was looking through my emails today before this chat, and I realized that, Aziz didn't wait to be asked. He would, as Desiree said, he would just send you an email saying, "Just came across this. I thought you'd be interested". And that was him telling you, "okay, maybe this is something you need to read". And I realized that long before school climate strikes you know that only Greta Thunberg gets credit for in the white Western world- Long before all of that happened, Aziz had been emailing me about students of colour organizing for climate justice in Australia. Now, how he was keeping tabs on that? I don't even know, he saw value in how technology and digital technology connected and dispersed information across barriers of distance and cost. But, you know, he had questions about it too.

[Joyeeta] The next question I think because Nisha said that you specifically wanted to speak about it. We had originally just talked about the lens of gender, but you said that Aziz's analysis was always race and gender together. Is that something you want to tell us more about?

[Désirée] And if I may add, I think it was always race, gender, and class, right? Race, gender, class and we talk about, you know, the question is also about migration, north, south. You know, in, every big bracket, North-South relations I think that is the lens through which Aziz is approached everything, right? So, I think it's not, yeah, just a question of, of bringing the lens of one, but it's like, understanding the workings of capitalism all the time. And I would even add, even though yeah, you could frame it in these terms, maybe differently, but also of racial capitalism. And so I think that, yeah, this is his analysis, but also constant in how he was thinking of organizing as well. So we spoke about the redistribution of resources, you know. It wasn't just, it wasn't just an analytical lens, but it's like, if you're thinking about this analytically, what does that mean in the practice of your work? You know, Nisha mentioned the question. For instance, I'm making the books accessible like this is also working through this lens. It's like if I'm producing this knowledge, how do I bring it back to the people that produce the knowledge? But also, how do I make it accessible and work against the boundaries that these neoliberal institutions that our universities are creating between, you know, quote unquote, "academic knowledge producers" and people that could have access to that knowledge. So I think it's that constant analytical view, but also pragmatic implications of having that analysis. If I understand these lenses, these power dynamics, if I understand the question of, yeah, gender, class, race, migration, what does that mean in practice? Into the daily work that I'm doing, which means in the classroom, which

means in my research, which means in my organizing, which means in... when I have access to resources, the questions of labor around it. So all of it, I think that is maybe also how he understood liberatory academic work, right. Is that if it stayed theoretical, or if it stayed not analytical, then it wasn't liberatory. So if you can have the lens all you want, if you don't put it into practice.ii it's just a lens, right? It's not actions. It's not concrete.

[Nisha] He talked a lot about Walter Rodney and Fanon, right? I had looked up some of his Fanon quotes and you've just given me an opening for it. This is from the same book, "Learning Activism", and he's quoting Fanon from *The Wretched of the Earth*: "If care is taken to use only a language that is understood by graduates in law and economics, you can easily prove that the masses have to be managed from above". That's why language matters, right? Aziz was doing so much caring work for migrant academic women of color like myself, I wasn't even aware of how many women like myself he was mentoring until after he passed, right? And So I think really that's what I wanted to speak to a little bit. I always wished he'd written about it, but he lived it. And that's what matters, and he touched all our lives. So I think... so his reading of the university, right, was always gendered, raced, and classed, as Désirée said. And I come from a working class background. I'm first generation to go to university, in my family, let alone to go abroad to get a foreign PhD. So the US was hard. But because of the long history of campus activism, and I'm not just talking about the 60s and the war, I'm talking about anti race, the struggles of black working class you know, Latino you know, migrant students... That's the big difference I've noticed right from, between Turtle Island and Australia is that I... there were these spaces and relationships of informal mentoring that I almost took for granted the 14 years that I was there. And at the same time I'm hearing you say Désirée, about how you struggle to find your space, right? To see yourself as someone who should be in university and should be getting a PhD. I hear all of that. And so, I really when I came to Australia, I was of course racialized again in different ways. But now I had no one to unpack it with except Aziz... I was just amazed by how keen his analysis was that he could... even though... he didn't know this system. He never went to university in Australia but he was able to continue to give me, you know, to create that space for me. To make sense of what I was experiencing. First to name it and to say, yes, it is happening. The micro and the macro aggressions that you're experiencing as a migrant settler woman of color, and working class academic. That is happening, you're not imagining it. You know, because when you have no one, that's what happens, right? When you you're isolated, you begin to think am I imagining it? Am I oversensitive? It doesn't help when managers tell you you're thin skinned and, you know, all of that gaslighting and mansplaining that goes on.

Yeah, so that I was thought about a lot in that question. It connects to how do we create spaces and what kinds of spaces in order to do this work, right? And you can't, in my personal opinion, create those spaces if you're not working with race, class, and gender, you just can't. I think that's why he could do what he could do even though most of his identity on paper was sort of left conventional class analysis and race, right? But in practice, it was clear to me that he got the gender issues as well, right? And which is

why he was able to do what he was and maintain those spaces. I think that's what I want to say.

[Désirée] Yeah, and you touch upon something like the mentoring aspect, you know, and I think that this is also, this is also important. I always say, you know, when I finished these 10 years, you know, Aziz and I, that's it. We worked together for 10 years. I said, you know, he was, he was my supervisor. He was a collaborator because we worked on certain things. I worked for him as his, you know, research administrative assistant, everything you want that comes with, you know, grant and things like this within the university. He was a co conspirator on project and so I think like all that diversity of opportunities was also, again, him creating that space and also him you know, creating opportunities for us to work in different ways together which is also creating space, right? Creating space, creating opportunities. The other thing that he also did very explicitly is... I mentioned before, like, using resources and using his position to leverage resources. And so I'll give an example as - I was doing some work around archives and community organizations, trying to think of yeah the space. Trying to think what is the role of archives? How are we preserving archives of movements? I was working with different groups, but I was also thinking about... as a community educator looking for resources to work with youth around questions of migration, particularly Caribbean youth. And so I remember once he, you know, sent me a link and he was like, "Look, there's this grant possibility. Would you, you know, could that be useful to you?" And it was like, "Oh, yeah, absolutely". And so, but it's a grant because I wasn't a professor because I was, I couldn't apply. And so very explicitly Aziz used his name and his affiliation to go and get that grant that he let me do whatever I want. And so we got a two year grant, which on paper was Aziz's grant, but which in practice, he never asked me anything. And it was so to McGill, this was, you know, Aziz's grant and to the reality of it was like, for two years, I did the projects, I would let him know what I was doing. I'll keep him in track, but he never asked me for anything and he never questioned anything or any of the decisions that I was making. I just told him I'm doing this and he was like, okay, perfect. You let me know what I need to sign the reports and that's it. And so that's one more than mentoring. That's, that's ultimately using resources, but that's also trust. You know what I mean? And it was like, trust that I would, I would do whatever I needed to do. And that he didn't even need to have a oversight on it. And so I think that this is also something in working through these, these spaces and these institutions that "a" create these hierarchies, but also create mistrust between people is to anchor yourself in the trust and saying, "Hey, we're doing this together. We're doing this. We're co conspirators, you know, co conspirators on this. You do what you need to do. You let me know if I can help you." And that's it.

[Joyeeta] If I may intervene in this, it's like, it's a good, I mean, in a post MeToo world, it's always good to hear of experiences of positive experiences of mentorship because when one gets so jaded with the sort of stories as young women in academia as well. So it's, it's very reassuring to sort of have a sort of renewal of faith in people, I suppose. Thanks for sharing that as well.

[Soledad] Yeah, definitely. And, and be inspired and think how we can also contribute to that and make a better academia, and also make it as a way of advocacy in a sense.

We appreciate your time to connect today. Thank you so much! It's been a wave of fresh air and so heartwarming to learn more about Aziz together and engage in dialogue. We hope that further activists and scholars also, and people in general, are inspired by these conversations and that these provide also food for thought.

Please check the podcast description for a previous session and the blog that sums up the conversations also, that are in Spanish and Hindi.

Everyone is welcome also to translate the transcriptions or the blog or pick up these conversations and remix them and continue making knowledge available and reflecting on the importance of these topics.

Connect with Désirée, Nisha, Mario, Fergal and Salim's work. They're really approachable and amazing people continuing with Aziz' Legacy.

[Nisha] Thank you so much. I want to say thank you to both of you for making this happen. Thank you for honoring Aziz in this way and yeah, for allowing us to remember him and celebrate him. And as Désirée said, make new connections. So thank you for this,[Désirée] That was yeah, I think it's a testament to the continuation of the connections he built. Right.

[Nisha] Yes, every time I get an email now from someone I don't know, it's like, how would Aziz answer this email, right? Like you said, you know, we're all time poor and overworked, but yeah, yeah, his generosity was really amazing.

[Désirée] Yeah, absolutely. And, and his again, ability to, I always say, you know, as this was a tremendous researcher, one of the best research skills he has was into old pop music. You know, when you're like in the thick of it and losing it, you'd be like, "Have you ever heard this from the eighties?" Or like, did you know that I always laugh at him because he always had jokes about Justin Bieber. And I was like, how do you keep Justin Bieber in the midst of this? And so I think it's also like being able to, keep a sense of humor through it all, because otherwise, yeah, otherwise you lose it. So I think keeping that, yeah, kind of sense of playfulness also and humor in the midst of it all is super important. Super important.

[Soledad] The importance of humor and rest and yeah, and trying to make the best, yeah with our resources.

[Soledad] We appreciate Nisha and Désirée's reflections and time to continue honouring Aziz's contributions to social movements, learning and academia.

[Soledad] We appreciate Nisha and Désirée's reflections and time to continue honouring Aziz's contributions to social movements, learning and academia.

We hope that these efforts encourage further scholars, activists and community workers to keep struggling together, providing a language, enquiring and contesting dominant knowledge structures.

Check the podcast description to read the transcript in English and a blog with a summary in Spanish and Hindi.

Don't miss the prior podcast and blog with Salim Vally, Fergal Finnegan and Mario Novelli.

We have added links to Aziz and his colleagues' work at the podcast description.

Thanks for listening!