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8th Annual Stuart Hall Public Conversation with Françoise Vergès: There Will Be No Future Without Seizing the Present

17th May 2025. Part of 'In Search of Common Ground' – learn more here.

[INSTRUMENTAL JAZZ]

ORSOD MALIK: Good evening, everyone. My name is Orsod Malik, and I'm the Executive Director of the Stuart Hall Foundation. It's a real pleasure to welcome you all to our eighth annual Stuart Hall Public Conversation. We are truly honoured to be joined tonight by you and the brilliant, the indomitable Françoise Vergès.

Before we begin, a brief overview of the evening. I'll start with a few opening reflections to ground us all here together before introducing Françoise. Françoise will then deliver her keynote, which will last around 45 minutes. After that, we'll take a 25-minute refreshment break. I would encourage you to stop by the Newham Bookstore just outside and to say hello to our friends at Skin Deep Magazine, who have set up a really brilliant pop-up library at the back of the hall. They've recently released their ten-year anthology, so please do check it out. After the break, we'll return for a discussion and Q&A, which will be convened by my dear friend and director of the Decolonial Centre, the incisive and insightful Mohammed Elnaiem. We will end with a commissioned poem by Selina Nwulu, filmed by Alice Kanako, at around six o'clock, and then afterwards, if you can, please do stay and join us for some food and drinks before we close at 7.30. And fire exits are located to your right and to your left at the back of the hall, and they are lit in blue, but please do reach out to either me or one of my colleagues and we'll be glad to assist.

And for those encountering him for the first time, the person speaking in the clip you just saw is Professor Stuart Hall, Jamaican intellectual, educator, political theorist and founding figure of British cultural studies. He was a driving force behind initiatives and organisations and institutions which endure today, such as the New Left Review, the Open University, Autograph — the Association of Black Photographers — and Inova, the Institute of International Visual Arts. Stuart Hall's perhaps best known as a public intellectual whose work advanced Marxist theories and approaches while shaping popular understandings of concepts such as diaspora, representation, cultural identities and the relationship between race and class. His influence endures among generations of scholars, artists and organisers striving for racial and social justice under increasingly hostile and degenerative conditions.

To those attending a Stuart Hall event for the first time, welcome. The Foundation was established in 2015 by Professor Hall's family, friends and colleagues, people whose lives were deeply marked by his love, mentorship and intellectual generosity, and his life marked by theirs. This year is our birth year, our 10th anniversary. Ten years of bridging the arts, academia and activism in the spirit of Professor Hall's lifelong commitment to producing knowledge about our shared present in pursuit of a society at ease with difference.

Our mission is to advance this commitment, to popularise critical thought through public education and supporting the creative and intellectual development of new generations of practitioners and organisers who are challenging issues of inequality through their work.

Tonight's event, our eighth annual Stuart Hall Public Conversation, is the opening of our 2025 programme In Search of Common Ground. This year's long series of events, conversations, community film screenings and artists in conversation are dedicated to celebrating Professor Hall's life, legacy and influence on practitioners and organisers working today.

Let us take stock for a brief moment of our shared present. Just before last year's general election, our current government let it be known that they would, quote, "treat the world as it is, not as we would wish it to be". "Treat the world as it is, not as we would wish it to be". This has become the catchy slogan of Labour's political project, tasked with steering us all through climate catastrophe, global conflicts, economic decline, affordable housing shortages, inflation, the trashing of the international rules-based system, failing public services, soaring rents and the normalisation of global fascism and genocide. "Progressive realism", they call it. This is the antidote. A political project committed at least by name to responding to crisis with maintenance, with holding the line, with stasis, with keeping things as they are, or were — it's not entirely clear to me, but I'm trying to piece it together with you all nonetheless. "Treat the world as it is, not as

we would wish it to be." I thought about the implications of such a pledge in the context in which Labour seeks to apply it.

If you dare tune into a morning broadcast in Britain, the host may remind you in one way or another by invoking the language of the culture wars or otherwise that we are living through polarising times, referring, it seems, to the people rushing to either end of the political spectrum in a desperate search for alternative political projects after nearly two years of austerity, first in blue and now in red.For example, "polarisation" might be the word used to describe national debates on migration, about whether people fleeing this country's bombs and imperial meddling deserve our scorn or our solidarity. It's a word that has recently been used to frame responses to the Supreme Court's ruling on the definition of gender, and debates about whether the state has the final say over our identities and the real-life implication of such rulings on our trans and nonbinary siblings. You may tune into a broadcast where pundits are debating the nation's colonial legacies, questioning whether a popular version of British history can reflect us all, whether it can hold more than just Churchill's wartime heroics, the abolitionists and home-grown achievements in industry and seafaring before it is dismissed as "too woke". Or whether climate demonstrators and anti-war activists putting their bodies on the line to uphold our collective humanity are worthy of prison or praise.

In such moments, the word "polarising" might be taken at face value as describing a political and cultural landscape in which divisions are rife, where the only sensible move, as demonstrated by a very grown-up, very managerial political class, is to mimic the far right while also clinging to a rightward-moving centre position, gripping tightly to a world fading into the rear view during a moment of rapid social change. But what if we cast a different gaze upon the moment? Perhaps we ought to consider polarisation as a symptom of deeper, irreversible ruptures, a sign that once-settled categories, identities and political allegiances have been dislodged from their common-sense position, that once-dominant understandings of society, of who we are and how we live together, no longer hold. That the stories we've relied on to make sense of the country's past and present in our curriculums, our museums, our stately commemorations and celebrations, are coming undone. This unravelling, this loosening of the linchpins that once maintained a convincing sense of cohesion, has created new openings in our political landscape, while also reinforcing familiar foreclosures, albeit inflected slightly differently.

Consider this: Boris Johnson presided over one of the most diverse cabinets in British history in 2019. We've had a brown Prime Minister and a black woman leading the Conservative Party, pushing some of the most draconian policing bills and anti-immigration policies in recent memory just five years after the global protests and rebellions against institutional racism and state violence. The supposed party political representatives of the left are cosplaying Enoch Powell, mainstreaming far-right

rhetoric, administering benefit cuts to the elderly and the disabled, and aiding and abetting Israel's livestreamed genocide and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians.

And yet, amongst this unfamiliarly familiar party political landscape, historically marginalised groups — women, disabled folks, communities with ties to elsewhere, our queer siblings — are loudly staking their claim to this society with growing popular support. Demanding that the state recognise peoples and communities it has long harmed, undermined, exploited, made vulnerable or rendered invisible, while national cultural and heritage institutions are scrambling to reckon with their long-omitted ties to power, to the triangular trade, to colonisation, to empire, to us.

The point about history really matters here, because the national histories that once helped bind a shared sense of belonging, historical narratives that up until recently seemed infallible in the popular imaginary, are now being publicly scrutinised and reappraised from the grassroots to the Tate Britain. One might easily be led to think that our society is facing a crisis of identity. Not necessarily an island of strangers, as Starmer put it, but rather an island whose leaders are fresh out of ideas. And it's in this context that we place Professor Hall's vital question from his 1998 essay Culture, Identity and Diaspora into play:

> *"How can we organise these huge, randomly varied, and diverse things we call human subjects into positions where they can recognise one another for long enough to act together, and thus to take up a position that one of these days might live out and act through as an identity? Identity is at the end, not the beginning, of the paradigm. Identity is what is at stake in political organisation. It isn't that subjects are there and we just can't get to them. It is that they don't know yet know that they are subjects of a possible discourse. And that always in every political struggle, since every political struggle is always open, it is possible either to win their identification or lose it."*

So our 2025 programme In Search of Common Ground considers Hall's words as a profoundly, profoundly creative proposition, challenging all of us to come together and build a politics that speaks to the specificity of this moment that we are living through. Hall's questioning invites us to take stock of our conditions, to locate the intersections where our histories and political interests might meet, and dares us to build a collective politics that is flexible enough to hold, even if momentarily, the sum of our individual concerns. Now, when I speak of common ground, I want to be very clear — This is not a call for Kum Ba Ya politics. This is not a plea to accept the terms of our current state of affairs, nor an apolitical plea to set our differences aside. We're not talking about folding, shrinking or contorting ourselves to fit within the limitations of predetermined, essentialising categories or political positions, or assimilating ourselves into a dominant culture.

We're talking about maximising our creative energies and our imaginations to expand or remake the categories through which we organise, re-articulate ideologies from different positions, centre our relations and responsibilities to one another's flourishing, so that we can build a politics that can at least attempt, at least attempt, to hold us all. This programme is about insisting on openings. It's about widening the possibilities to make multiple meanings of our world and ourselves... Sorry... It's about widening the possibilities to make multiple meanings of ourselves and the world in which we live, about resisting political and cultural foreclosures wherever we may encounter them.

When we refer to building common ground, we mean from the bottom up, constructing a politics that places something new into the world by virtue of us confronting the novel elements of the present situation, a politics that increases our capacity to care for one another, to become the other. To become the other, as Edward Said reminds us.

I'm thinking here of Fred Hampton uniting the Chicago chapter of the Black Panther Party together with the Puerto Rican Young Lords and the white working class Young Patriots to form the Rainbow Coalition. I'm thinking of Frantz Fanon being further radicalised by his Muslim and Jewish Algerian comrades, helping him see the interrelations between the Antilleans and the Africans struggling against French colonisation on either side of the Atlantic. I'm thinking of Martin Luther King risking it all to express his solidarity with the Vietnamese fighting US imperialism. I'm thinking of the 1961 Afro-Asian Women's Conference in Cairo, and the coming together of women from 37 countries, working to understand one another's differences in order to expand their notion of liberation along local and global registers. I'm thinking of students from different backgrounds and religious affiliations setting up encampments on university lawns all around the world to stand with Palestine against the foreclosures that colonisation, imperialism, apartheid, ethnic cleansing and genocide necessitate. I'm thinking of CLR James' offering to all of us: "These are my ancestors, these are my people. "They are yours too if you want them." I'm thinking about all the times difference has expanded our political horizons far beyond the world as it is.

Let us draw from our shared histories, then, to help orient ourselves towards building a political project in which there is a possibility for all life to be affirmed. Let us expand our definitions of freedom so that we can build a common ground that is co-constitutive and ever-expanding, never predetermined, never static, never boundaried, never conditional, never frozen in time. Let us attempt to enact the following maxim: *"My freedom depends on your being free, and yours on mine."*

Not for any hope of certainty or assurances of victory, but solely for the purpose of developing a practice of recognition, of stretching ourselves to honour our responsibilities to one another's safety, of becoming the other, for as Professor Stuart Hall reminds us, there are no guarantees except good practice.

And there are few luminaries better placed, better equipped to talk to us about good practice, about seizing the present, about orienting our political imaginations towards wholesale revolutionary change, to all the possibility of forging a future in which all life can flourish, in which all life is protected, than political scientist, activist, historian, film writer, public educator and the author of Decolonial Feminisms: A Feminist History of Violence and A Programme of Absolute Disorder, the Françoise Vergès. So, without further delaying, please join me in giving a very warm, very, very warm welcome to Françoise for the eighth Stuart Hall Public Conversation.

[APPLAUSE]

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: Thank you. There will be no future unless we reappropriate the present. In 2024, I read the following exchange between two Palestinian women working as psychotherapists in a Gaza camp. To the question, "Are you OK?" The other answered, "No, I'm not. "How can I be OK when I live in a tent, battling the sand, the sun, "the heat, the cold, the lack of water and food? Am I OK? "I'm not hurt, I'm not dead, but no, I'm not OK. "I have lost both my past and my present. "My past is buried under the rubble or scattered along the path of exile. "I live in a present that no longer belongs to me." The sentence "I have lost both my past and my present "and I live in a present that no longer belongs to me" had a deep effect on me. I grew up with a strong investment in the future, with the promise of the coming liberation, with the call "one day, yes, one day we will be free," and bought it.

My father, born in Vietnam of a Vietnamese mother and a Réunionese father, my mother, a French woman, were both anti-colonial communist activists, and they told me that I belonged to a long line of people fighting for revolution, abolition, liberation, and that many have never seen the day of liberation, but this had never stopped the desire, the aspiration, the energy for the struggle. They taught me that I had to be aware that what was called France was a state, not just the name of a country, and that as a state, it will not hesitate to use all the weapons at its disposal — the police, the courts, the jail, the lie, the erasure, the censorship, the assassination, to crush the opposition when needed, and that you learned its armed force and its experience of repression — remember how the French secret police taught its torture technique at the School of the Americas — so, you know, will effectively send all its experience and its sophisticated weapons to the states sharing its politics of colonisation and racial capitalism. My parents also taught me that the struggle will be long and difficult, but also full of radical hope and emancipatory utopia. I witnessed people being beaten and protests broken up, my father taken to jail and my mother receiving death threats, their friends and comrades deprived of work, insulted, beaten and jailed. As a child, I was present during

police searches in my parents' home at dawn. I read "Vergès, murderer" written on a wall on my way to school. But the future was a promise, and Algeria, Mozambique, Mauritius, Angola, Cuba, South Africa, Vietnam bore the name of that future — independence, freedom, decolonisation, and despite the failings, setback and defeat, yes, one day we would be free.

But the word of that Palestinian woman questioned my trust in the future. What happens when we feel that we live in a present that no longer belongs to us, when the present is buried under the ruins of genocide, imperialist wars, catastrophic flood and fire, murderous anti-migrant policies, increased poverty, racism, Islamophobia and lives scattered on the route of exile? Does not imagining a post-racist, post-capitalist, post-patriarchal future currently look, then, like an impossible task? I cannot dispel a sense of despair and powerlessness, the feeling that defeat is a condition of the oppressed, and a long list comes to my mind — the crushing of a slave insurrection, the colonial massacre and genocide, the revolution betrayed, the post-colonial elites selling their country, the working class revolt crushed in blood, pacification, leaders tortured, disappeared, assassinated. Marielle Franco, Patrice Lumumba, Malcolm X, Fred Hampton, ben Barka. And also the less known: Norman Ortiz, Jendu Menda, Angelita Yanomami and so many others, indigenous and trans activists paying the highest price. The long counterrevolution.

But as anti-capitalist speculative fiction writer China Miéville writes, and I quote: "It is hard to avoid the sense "that these are particularly terrible days, "that dystopia is bleeding vividly into the quotidian. "At this point, however, comes an obligatory warning "about the historical ubiquity "of the questionable belief that things have gotten worse, "and of the sheer arrogance of despair, "the aggrandisement of thinking that one lives in the worst time, is there." Indeed, melancholia is a social pathology of neo-imperialist politics, as Paul Gilroy analysed, as a consolation for feeling guilty for the state of the world, protect from confronting the fabrication of premature deaths by racial capitalism. In an open letter to Extinction Rebellion in 2019, the grassroots Wretched Of The Earth Collective argued that the conception of dystopia in the North ignores the long dystopic past and present in the global South. And I quote:

> *“The bleakness is not something of “the future.” For those of us who are indigenous, working class, black, brown, queer, trans or disabled, the experience of structural violence became part of our birthright. Greta Thunberg calls world leaders to act by reminding them that “Our house is on fire.” For many of us, the house has been on fire for a long time: whenever the tide of ecological violence rises, our communities, especially in the Global South are always first hit. We are the first to face poor air quality, hunger, public health crises, drought, floods and displacement*.”

If there is one thing that we have been taught and that we are learning every day, it's that the counterrevolution is not just about killing, but also about reinvesting taste, cultural and social norms, offering vacuous contrition, diluting justice indefinitely, or offering an outlet for frustration and anger with racism, Islamophobia, war on terror, carceral punishment, fascism, arrestment of the "undeserved poor". If the normalisation of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment is not new, there is nonetheless a velocity to the global counterrevolution and to climate disaster that leaves us with rage and a feeling of powerlessness.

Or in the words of the Palestinian writer Osama Abu Jaser, based in Gaza, and I quote:

> *“Nobody can live without water.*
>
> *My heart was full of sorrow as I left the camp after seeing our destroyed home.*
>
> *My mind was full of questions.*
>
> *How will we live after the war ends?*
>
> *Where will we go?*
>
> *Who will rebuild our home?*
>
> *How long will it take for it to be rebuilt?*
>
> *I asked these and other questions all the way to the house where I am taking shelter.*
>
> *Then I became extremely tired.*
>
> *I forced myself not to think about our circumstances.*
>
> *So long as this war continues, we do not know if we will still be alive tomorrow.*
>
> *We have lost our home.*
>
> *Nothing is left but our souls.”*

I cannot ignore the normalisation of cruelty, of punitive politics, of the politics of demonisation, just as I cannot ignore the fragmentation of our own politics. Emancipatory utopias have rapidly been crushed. Military coup, dictatorship, structural adjustment programme, the stifling of dreams and incarceration. I know that despair is a weapon in the hands of racial capitalism and imperialism, and yet I know that we need to build common ground. There is no other choice. As black Canadian writer and scholar Robyn Maynard writes to scholar Michi Nishnaabeg and artist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and I quote: "All world endings are not tragic" and "some versions of this world need to end." "We hold dear and close all the reasons to rejoice — "the undying love of freedom, the joy of friendship.

If there is a remark by Stuart Hall that I carry with me every day, it is "we must practise a politics without guarantee". We must practise emancipatory politics without guarantee. We must practise freedom in a world of unfreedom, and we must do it in the present. We cannot put things off until tomorrow when things will be better. Where the struggle reveals contradiction and conflict, alliance and complicities, joy and hopes, is made intelligible as we are fighting. Common ground must be re-enacted, reimagined every day, because fear must be overcome, and because enemies as relentless, because we must confront a massive propaganda machine that manufactures consent for politics that put profit over people.

We hold the tension between mourning and radical hope. We view the tapestry of common ground from the ashes. We know that the current genocide in Gaza is not an exceptional event. It is a repetition, or as Palestinians say, an episode in a long Nakba. And we remember Aimé Césaire's words, and I quote, *"The hour of the barbarian is at hand. The modern barbarian. The American hour. Violence, excess, waste, mercantilism, bluff, gregariousness, stupidity, vulgarity, disorder*." But we also know that a narrative of common ground does not obey the rule of the last page, does not have a conclusion. The end in this narrative is just an intermediary position between two moments.

There is no linear process of restoring...

[COUGHS]

Sorry.

There is no linear process of historical necessity. History is a complex and uneven way. Circumstances come together in a given *conjuncture*, to use Stuart Hall's word. And he remarks, I quote: "*the world presents itself in the chaos of appearances, and the only way in which one can understand, break down, analyze, grasp, in order to do something about the present conjuncture that confronts one, is to break into that series of congealed and opaque appearances with the only tools you have: concepts, ideas, and thoughts*."

Conjunctural politics is a method, he said, of describing the unique circumstances a particular moment posed. "*Typically disheartening in terms of his own socialist ideals – while at the same time providing the grounds for a potential route out of such circumstances*."

And we must remind ourselves that there is quite often a force, an unexpected dimension to insurrection, revolt and revolution. Things seem quiet. Business is going on as usual. People appear disciplined. Order and peace reign in the street. But the insurrectionary spirit is there, circulating underground. It's hiding, floating around, and

suddenly, its poems and songs are taken up by the many, and anger finds its way into the street, barricades are set up, squares are occupied.

Angela Davis told us after we witnessed Trump's inauguration with trepidation, I quote: "*we look back at struggles for justice and equality, we find that often there are propitious moments for these struggles. We are always confronted with waves of conservatism. And while we cannot create the conditions in which we engage, we can bring our determination, we can bring out our vision, for a better future. We confront finite disappointment with infinite hope*." Or as Robin Kelley said last year, "*systemic crises open possibilities for change.*"

There are many anniversaries this year — the victory of the Vietnamese against the US forces, the Nakba, among them, but I would like to speak of one, of this anniversary — the bicentennial anniversary of the ransom imposed by the French state on the young Republic of Haiti. What happened to Haiti, I see it as a warning to all of those who fight for dignity, freedom, justice and independence, and that warning still resonates today: *"Beware — you will pay. We will send armies, we will apply sanctions."*

On January 1st, 1804, as soon as the Republic of Haiti was proclaimed, the French state categorically refused to recognise the young republic, which had inflicted a terrible defeat on the Napoleonic army, and whose anti-colonial, anti-slavery and anti-racist revolution threatened the Western order. The French state imposed a blockade on April 17, 1825. The government of Haitian president Jean-Pierre Boyer yielded to the demand of King Charles X of France, who issued an ordinance stipulating that Haiti was to pay the colossal form of 150 million gold francs to the French state, intended to compensate former colonists for lost property. In other words, slave owners will be financially compensated for the loss of their proprietorship of a human being. That same year, the French state also reimbursed aristocrats who had lost property during the Revolution. The sacred principle of private property was enforced, and the counterrevolution was consolidated. But because the young Haitian Republic was insolvent, an unwritten clause required that the money be borrowed from French banks, what historians and economists have called the double debt. By 1914, over three quarters of the country's national budget was still being drained to repay French banks. It was not until 1947, more than 140 years after independence, that Haiti finally settled its debt. In 1914, the US government, which had long wanted to transform the island into a permanent military base in the Caribbean, found a pretext for military intervention. The Haitians having proved their, I quote, "inherent tendency to revert to savagery", the US State Secretary said, President Wilson decided to send the US Marines to occupy the island, and the last year of occupation was 1934, and the Marines immediately removed $500,000 from the Haitian national bank for "safekeeping" in New York. A new ransom, another ransom. And in 1970, the US imposed a new constitution that allowed foreign land ownership, which had been

outlawed since the Haitian revolution. And when, in April 2003, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, president of Haiti at the time, suggested that France should repay $21 billion in reparations for the money extorted after independence, he was overthrown by a military coup supported by the US some months later.

To Western powers, the creation of the Republic of Haiti was unthinkable, as Haitian historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot has written. The victory of an army of black people led by a black general resonated as an answer to white supremacy, as an existential threat. It sent panic through the Western world, sheer panic. A black republic will not prosper in the Caribbean. The island has to become a site of chaos, of people unable to govern themselves, in need of patronage. The lesson I want to draw from this, and which I relate to the topic of the day — blockade, ransom and sanction are the weapons of imperialism. Ransoms are transactional imperialism — recognition of sovereignty against access to resources. But also, that international solidarity is key. Haiti received none, not even from South American states, even though Haiti had supported their struggle for independence. The island was isolated, weakening the republic's resistance and feeding the machine of dispossession. Building common ground is building transnational solidarity. But this is not a lesson for despair. The story of Haiti belongs to the vast library of resistance where we find reasons for mourning and sources for radical hope.

I would like to stay a little longer on punitive politics and look at the emergence of what Ruth Wilson Gilmore has called the anti-state state, which surfaced in the wake of the 1970s economic crisis and liberal capitalism's crisis of legitimacy, and gained strength in the decades since, taking hold in both major political parties and surviving catastrophic financial collapse a decade ago. Ruth Wilson Gilmore said that we have since been facing, I quote, "the ascendance of anti-state state actors, "people and parties who gain state power by denouncing state power, "intent on slashing the last vestige of some social laws, "while at the same time expanding "the carceral and militarised function of the state".

I am interested in that last version of punitive politics, which is still feeding government and international institutional policies. The one that racial neoliberalism-capitalism has promoted. And a little, you know, reminder here: On January 16, 1970, in a memo addressed to Richard Nixon, then the President of the United States, Democrat Senator Patrick Moynihan suggested, and I quote: *"That the time may have come when the issue of race "could benefit from a period of benign neglect"*. He claimed that the cause of high crime rates in black neighbourhoods and poverty was African-American alienation from society due to their antisocial lifestyle, such as living in female-dominated households.

Benign neglect would mean, for instance, that firefighting teams were to ignore black neighbourhoods, because fires were caused by black people's tendency to

spontaneously start arson. Benign neglect condoned the abandonment of public services in black neighbourhoods by representing them as dangerous, unhealthy and deteriorated because of inner deficiency. Female, you know, heads of the household and lack of positive role models — a lot has been written about that, as you know. Benign neglect has had a successful life. Thatcherism, socialist austerity policies in France, a return of the austerity policies imposed in the 1960s in the global South, destroying public health and education services, now imposed on European countries like Greece, Italy and Portugal, and on the poor and racialised people in the globalised north. We perhaps could think of it as a "shock in return", as Aimé Césaire argues of fascism in Discourse of Colonialism. Punitive politics are then normalised, and normalisation slips into naturalisation, and people imagine that locking people in cages or bombing civilians or sending generation after generation off to kill somebody else's children is a part of human nature.

The category of crime was and still is central to the emergence of the anti-state state through what Stuart Hall has called a displacement, a discrepancy between threat and reaction that takes the form of a mass moral panic. In Europe, the moral panic has taken the form of Islamophobia, the fear of migrant and refugee, of trans and queer people, and of the poor who "refuse to work" and "live on benefits".

I have been studying within this politics the structural denial of basic vital needs along racial and class lines, along also, you know, every page of the colonial racial division between clean and dirty. I study it also because I look at the growing gap between technological and scientific discovery — absolutely amazing every day — and the lack of satisfaction of basic needs for the many, by which I mean access to water, to hygienic products, to protection from the cold and the heat. Again, if nothing is new, the politics of humiliation and exhaustion, the weaponisation of fatigue and stress, that target the mind and the body in a world where the industry of wellness is flourishing, show a geography that sets up stronger borders between rich and poor, between the healthy and unhealthy. The living space of the poor and racialised is being constantly narrowed.

And to me, it is important to free the issue of the satisfaction of vital needs from humanitarianism and to make them again a terrain for building common ground and for political struggle.

Description of life in refugee camps, in detention camps, in temporary housing, in women's refuge, in migrants' hostel, in prison, in youth education centre and psychiatric ward, in hospice for the elderly, all paint a picture of organised neglect. A lack of water, overpopulated cells and rooms, dirty toilets, one shower for 10 or 20 people, no warm water, dirty sheets, no soap, bad shampoo, cockroaches, rats, peeling paint, bad smells, bad food. All this is absolutely a choice, a political choice. But also, when we learn that Amazon and slaughterhouse workers in the US are forced to wear diapers because of restricted access to toilets, when we also learn that female survivors after

earthquakes, floods or megafires — and we can think of Pakistan in 2022 or Turkey in 2023 — and they learn that girls and women find it very difficult to ask for sanitary pads, that pregnant women have found no basic medical care, no medical support for themselves and their newborns, that miscarriage has risen drastically, that they have found no food, no security, that girls and women suffer incredible numbers of urinary tract infections, but also when we learn that girls in the UK, US and Poland, that teenagers cannot afford to buy sanitary pads and have to use pieces of paper and clothes. This is for me a political question and not a humanitarian question. When the elemental needs of racialised women are considered insignificant and trivial, I think this is a political question and not a humanitarian issue.

In Gaza's refugee camps, Palestinian women who have been forced to cut pieces of tent for making sanitary pads express what it means to be deprived of vital needs. And I quote:

> *"We had no bathroom, no running water and no electricity.*
>
> *In the tent, there was no such thing as "me." It was a space for survival and nothing else.*
>
> *Breastfeeding my child at the time was a suffocating task – physically and psychologically.*
>
> *Having a room might sound an ordinary privilege to most people, but this war has taught us the precious value of basic necessities.*
>
> *I have no strength left and no patience for the utter lack of privacy.*
>
> *I am just a woman who wants to close a door behind her and a space to be alone to cry in. I want to be "me" again."*

All this is repeated in Congo and Sudan, but also London, Paris or New York. Intimacy is a privilege. Racialised men are not preserved. They too are deprived of vital needs. When in February 2023, Israeli national security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir told the Israel prison service to reduce the amount of time that Palestinian security prisoners were allowed to shower and to remove ovens, saying he wanted to deny imprisoned terrorists "perks including fresh-baked pitas", he was clearly summarising the politics of denial of vital needs, which are: degrade, humiliate, punish.

Structurally racist built environments make black and brown people, Arabs, indigenous women and men, trans and queer people and the undeserving poor all more susceptible to premature death. Scarcity is organised.

But if people's vital needs are not fulfilled, the neoliberal narrative goes, it has nothing to do with organised abandonment, but everything to do with state bureaucracy, laziness, lack of personal effort, migrant, queer, refugee and trans. Racism, cruelty and

meanness is rewarded and fascism gives an outlet to frustration and resentment. The ruling class are sure that police will be done for them. They also all agree the fact that waste is externalised for their surroundings, dumped in poor neighbourhoods and in the global South, and that the cleaning up of their beaches, golf courses and neighbourhoods will be done by the people that they send to this unclean place. They support the greening and gentrification of poor neighbourhoods in the name environmental policy, but they want to keep a touch of working class or ethnicity for decor. They encourage the creation of enclaves in the form of luxurious resorts in the global south for their own enjoyment, for hunting, sunbathing, admiring birds, you know, getting massage, resting in luxury. They want forests, birds and butterflies, but protected from the presence of the racialised and the poor, who are allowed to enter their enclave only as deliverers, sex workers, cleaners, gardeners, cooks or nannies. Social and racial segregation are reorganised with the argument for a better and safer environment, or as activists, to summarise the political denial of vital needs… Fannie Lou Hamer summarised the political denial of vital needs with these words, as she explained in 1972 why she created the Freedom Farm Cooperative, and I quote: "*Down where we are, food is used as a political weapon*."

Benign neglect is low intensity war against people under the guise of peace or order. Peace? I hear that, you know, peace, that word. And we have been hearing a lot about peace recently, how Europe has enjoyed peace, you know, for decades, how Europe was able to protect its society from the return of fascism and fanaticism. But what kind of peace is this when genocide is under way in Palestine, when European governments are calling for an intensification of militarisation, when India suspends the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty with Pakistan and a senior Indian official is warring to ensure that not even a drop of water will go to Pakistan. When a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates is destroying Sudan. When Yemen is being bombed by superior power. When leaders have dreams of Great Russia, Great China, great this, great that. Should we then not reappropriate the meaning of peace? Shall we not free peace from the hand covered with blood and reappropriate it as a terrain for building common grounds?

On May 8, the German Foreign Minister released a four-minute clip directed by the much-admired German award-winning film-maker Wim Wenders, and the clip was called The Keys to Freedom, which stands, Wenders said in the clip, as a reminder that peace cannot be taken for granted. Wenders is filmed visiting the French school in Reims where the Nazi army general chief of staff General Alfred Jodl signed Nazi Germany's total surrender during the night of March 8, 1945. The decree was ratified in Berlin the following day on the insistence of the Soviet Union. In the clip, archive with dramatic music accompanying the Nazi general entering the school as we hear Wenders' voice. And I quote: "Twelve years of terror, six years of war, "the Holocaust, the worst crimes the world has ever known, "end here, in a school in Reims." Wenders is

very touched by the sight of a set of keys in the school museum. They are those that the US commander in chief returned to Reims' mayor at a ceremony, saying, "These are the keys to the freedom of the world." "But the peace brokered in that schoolhouse is now under threat," Wenders says. And he said: "I have lived 80 years in peace, "a peace the night in this school bought us all. "Today, in its fourth year, there is war in Europe again. "It is also a war against Europe. "It's now up to us to take the keys to freedom in our own hands." I don't know if Wenders is aware of the symbolism of the key among Palestinian refugees, but whether he is or not, his choice to situate the importance of the keys to freedom in Europe says a lot. He has learned nothing in the 80 years of his life. Nothing about Hiroshima, Nagasaki, the war in Vietnam, Cameroon, Algeria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Congo, Kashmir, Guatemala, Salvador. It is not peace for everyone.

So was it one of those moments when history brings together events whose proximity reveals what should have remained marginalised? The victory of organising and 18 months of bombing, starvation, drone killing, massive arrests of children, women and men in Gaza, by state whose justification rests heavily on "never again". But as the affirmation of the universal "all humans are created equal" was in fact selective, "never again" is not for everyone. What Europe calls peace has been at the expense of war waged against people around the world. The Pax Americana that was instituted after World War II and which is, according to media and politicians, threatened by Trump at the moment, was a systemic organisation of a militarised world under US leadership, and the creation of institutions — the World Bank, the IMF, the World Trade Organization and NATO — in charge of enforcing the domination of the US dollar and of preserving the interests of its economic system. There has been no peace, but continuous wars against people's aspirations for freedom and decolonisation. This peace, that what, you know, the Europeans call peace, is what Rosa Luxemburg in a 1911 text called "armed peace", the other face of militarism. Militarism being wars — the direct war and armed peace.

In a 2019 interview, South African activist Sibusiso Innocent Zikode, co-founder in 2005 of the South African shack dwellers' movement and of the University of the Poor, explained what he meant by living politics and living communism. "A living politics," he said, I quote, "is not a politics that requires a formal education. "A living politics is a politics that is easily understood. "It is a politics that knows that we have no water, "but that in fact we all deserve water. "It is a politics that everyone must have electricity, "that understanding that there are not toilets "but in fact there should be toilets, is a living politics." He went on explaining his idea of a living communism, which is, he says, a living idea and a living practice of ordinary people. The idea is a full and real equality of everyone without exception. The practice... Well, a community must collectively own or forcefully take collective ownership of natural resources, especially the water supply, the land and the food. Every community is rightfully entitled to this resource. What is

needed for your life or your safety, for your dignity, should always be the starting point of living communism.

To the demand for living communism, add what indigenous women in Guatemala call "a life of plenty". I answer to the invitation by Robyn Maynard to practise "rehearsal for living", which means practising friendship and solidarity, kinship and connection in a world shattering under the intersection of crisis, of pandemic, police killing and climate catastrophe. I follow the advice of Aviah Sarah Day and Shanice Octavia McBean, who say to "work toward the wider goal of seizing the land, "natural resources and wealth stolen from us by capitalism.

"Abolition must work in service of proletarian revolution." Abolition is not a blueprint, like politics should not be with guarantee. It is a method for common ground. It is in the context of organised restriction of life, of the fabrication of premature death in the context of the politics of cruelty that we must find infinite hope. We will not find it in the politics of appeal, by being the perfect victim or by curating the native as respectable, as Palestinian writer Mohammed El-Kurd argues in his defence of the Palestinian condition of resistance and refusal, what they called Sumud, the "unique iteration of resilience and steadfastness "developed by Palestinians in response to their experience of Nakba".

"El tiempo de la revolucìon es ahora," Argentinian feminists shouted when they were protesting. "The time of the revolution is now." I could be told that now with Javier Milei in Argentina, the time of the revolution looks like it had been delayed. It does look that way quite often. But rather than thinking of defeat in military terms — scorched earth, massacre, deportation and genocide — let us see defeat as a chapter in the long fight for liberation and freedom against a determined enemy. As there is no longer a global revolutionary subject — the peasant, the worker, the woman — we still have many names for liberation. Burkina Faso, Senegal, Sudan, Lebanon, Kenya, Chile, France, Italy, Peru. The 250 million Indian peasants striking in 2022, the feminists protesting in Argentina and Mexico, the student encampments for Palestine in the USA, UK, Canada. The occupation of anti-building in the centre of São Paulo. The victorious strike of cleaning women in Paris in 2022, and so many others. Still crushed, still reorganising. We are holding together mourning and radical hope as we hope to establish our own temporality. The present is ours.

We do the labour day by day. We avoid the idealisation and glorification of martyrdom. We listen to friends and comrades who feel frustrated and powerless. We held them in our arms. We know that people, that we, are flawed. We nurture joy, we rehearse freedom, we find common ground. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

ORSOD MALIK: So, I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome my dear friend, Mohammed Elnaiem. Mohammed is a researcher and author and director of the Decolonial Centre, a Pluto Educational Trust project dedicated to anti-colonial and decolonial political education. His former column, Black Radicals, ran for two years on JSTOR Daily. He has published for news and political analysis outlets including Al Jazeera, New Internationalist, Jacobin Magazine, The Funambulist, Africa Is A Country, World Politics Review, The Global African Worker, New Frame, ROAR Magazine and Toward Freedom. In his writing and research, he has explored various topics, including blackness, the Sudanese revolution, reparations movements, the history of slavery and imperialism, and the relationship between capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy. Mohammed and Françoise will be in conversation with one another for 40 minutes before Mohammed convenes the audience Q&A. On the topic of the Q&A, and I say this with the utmost kindness, please keep your questions short, Please ensure that they are indeed questions, please!

[SOME AUDIENCE LAUGHTER]

Rather than statements, and try and leave as much room as possible for others to contribute. OK? Please. Please, please, please. You will be cut off, actually, I have to say. You will. OK? We have a reception afterwards, as I've mentioned, where much more time for informal conversations, you know, so we'll be able to ask questions at our leisure. So thank you all, and please join me again in giving a very warm welcome to Mohammed Elnaiem. Over to you, Mohammed.

[APPLAUSE]

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: Can you all hear me? Yes, good. All right. So, definitely that was something that was foregrounded in your incredible speech right now, which I hope inspired us all to leave this room and go out and organise, even if that means reading groups. For example, there's the Left Book Club here. They do amazing reading groups on radical ideals. But also, joining organisations is incredibly important to understand the moment that we're in and the conjuncture that we're in. And one of the things that you foregrounded, really, was this idea that there is no guarantee, that we will fight for a better world, but that there is no promised land that's guaranteed to us all, and that's one of the main themes of some of Stuart Hall's ideas. You've met Stuart Hall before. Can you tell us how you met Stuart Hall?

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: Yes, in '96, I was doing my PhD in Berkeley, and I was contacted by Isaac Julien, who was doing the film on Fanon, and he interviewed me, and so we came to Europe, and there was a conference at the ICA, and I met Stuart Hall then. And there is something, because listening to him again, that for me, it's his voice. His voice, I mean, the way he speaks and the tone, that I hear something of the... I don't know, but the voice was absolutely for me very important, and so... And then after, we had this, during the Documenta with Okwui Enwezor as curator. Okwui wanted to do something on Creolization, one of the platforms, so we met in St Lucia. And there was Derek Walcott, and there was Stuart, and the interesting thing was to bring the processes of Creolization of the Caribbean with those of the Indian Ocean, so the two would meet, because they are not exactly the same kind of thing. And so, for me, you know, and then when I worked at Sussex University and then at Goldsmiths, I met Stuart once in a while, but his writing, his thinking, but also his commitment, for me, were absolutely very... Yes, that was very important. But, you know, saying "very important" is banal, in a way. But it belonged to... it answered also for me a lot of questions and a way of looking at the world from someone coming also from an island, although Jamaica is much bigger than Réunion, but also that these two parts of, you know, marked by colonisation and imperialism, and also moving then after to the centre of the imperial country — France for me, the UK for Stuart — and though we are not the same generation, but that also seemed likes an echo that I hear in what he was writing about.

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: Mm-hm. Yeah, and I guess for us, one of the things, and I speak here specifically maybe about the very young people, but also the very old people, in the sense that both of these demographics have been kind of thrown away by the existing system. For example, here in Britain, one of the first things that austerity did under the new government was to take away the heating and the living allowance for some of the older people. And you talked about these kind of elemental needs. And obviously, you also said that these were political, that we shouldn't just cede the ground of approaching this to humanitarianism, which picks up after the political failure has happened. What do you think the consequences are of progressive forces not building this kind of elemental politics today?

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: Well, it's when, for instance, Zikode talks about the politics of what is called "ordinary people", I think is extremely important, I mean, especially in Europe. I mean, the left has sort of abandoned what are effectively the needs, you know, and the fact that if you don't have water, if you don't have food, if you don't have decent housing, and if you live in places that are full... I mean, what I would describe, you know, the jail or the detention centre, it's really, the message is, you don't matter. I mean, you can really... We can... Your life belongs to that world, and you will not have either. So I

think that's part of... You know, I think it's a political choice by those who are in power. It's not... So one is just left to endure, to take care of this, and fortunately, quite often, they are there, but it's a political question, for me. It's a political struggle, because it deeply... What do we call... demonisation, and we have to understand, a demonisation, and Césaire talks about it and Nkrumah talks about it, Cabral and Fanon and so many others, and not only men, but also women, and feminists, and it's really about what... And that in the modern world, in the Western modern world, is anchored already in slavery, the fact that some bodies, of some people, you know, and the life will not matter, and will be deprived, and so the resistance to that constantly, to say, yes, we are human, and what is to be human and is not to be degraded, humiliated and constantly punished just for wanting to have a decent life. So for me, the punitive politics which have always existed, they did not start, you know, right now, but they are increasing with all the arguments of austerity — too much spending, people are stealing, you know, and are not doing what they should be doing, they don't deserve it. Our part... It is political for me, and so this... The condition of living is a political struggle. It is not a humanitarian one. It should not be left to NGOs.

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: And the absence of these elemental needs, I think, is something that's ubiquitous across many societies.

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: Mm-hm.

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: And traditionally, in the era of national liberation, that was... Those were the basis upon which to build the national liberation front. But there was always the concern also, and I think Fanon writes about this, where you have people who, let's say, have been completely abandoned, live on the outskirts of the city, don't have access to organised housing, don't have access to political organisations, etc. These people could be recruited onto the cause of national liberation, but there is also always the risk that they could also be recruited by the forces of reaction and maintaining colonial oppression.

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: Yes.

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: And the reason why I ask this question in particular is because, in this world today where many people don't have access to stable rent, they don't have access to a stable sense of self, they don't know if they're ever going to be able to build a

family, quote unquote, etc, all of those things, this could be the potential for a progressive front. I think the despair that many of us feel is that instead, that is — all across the world, not just in Europe — it's also the recruiting ground for the punitive forces, for the anti-state state, for militias and paramilitary gangs that maintain the order, for police, the police forces of the world, and for even the far right. There's no guarantee that, regardless of a person's gender identity, gender, skin tone, etc, there's no guarantee that these people could be recruited into a progressive politics. But how do we build, and it's a big question — we can maybe try, and hopefully the audience can also help us figure this one out — but how do we build a politics of the elemental basic needs with no guarantee that these forces will join our side?

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: Yes, no guarantee, as you say, and you describe it well. But first, we have to descend to people. When I was going to join the picket line of the women cleaning hotels in Paris, at the beginning, there were, like, no feminists on the picket line. Because they thought that this was, like, just a union question, you know, for salaries and working conditions. What with everything, they had to get up at 4am in the morning to arrive at 7am, you know, in Paris, because they could not afford to live in Paris, and then they arrive, and usually they have to do ten rooms, and they were told they have to do 15 or 20, and so they were exhausted. They were telling me that, you know, quite quickly they have had many surgeries on their knees and everything, because everything is very heavy, they breathe a lot of chemicals, because they have to be used. The fact that a lot of customers, they were telling me, leave the room in a total disgusting state, as if, you know, and they were thinking, they would not do that at home. So they do that because they know that a woman of colour would come to clean that. And this was not even considered an issue, as, you know, there were descriptions of conditions, but for me, there was the political humiliation and degradation that goes along with exploitation. It's not just pure exploitation. It's not just the fact that they will be underpaid or have to work, you know, not just ten rooms but, like, 15 they will have to clean. It's the fact that this goes with that. And so this part of the political struggle, and they were explaining it, and it was quite difficult — even the union at the beginning was like... wanted to focus on salary and working conditions, because this is what is being heard. This, people would grasp right away, because that's the vocabulary of struggle. But the fight that, you know, getting up at 4am, it's part of just the narrative, the descriptive narrative, but not part of the analysis of exploitation. So for me, this is part of effectively the long history of the politics of exhaustion, that also Fanon refers to, the fact that not your body, but your mind also will be exhausted constantly, you know? So the shortened life, what Ruth Wilson called "premature death", the fabrication of premature death. All these are not descriptive things. They are talking about the organisation, the fabrication of that, that is totally political for me, part of the struggle for liberation. But effectively, there will be no guarantee that this, you know, what's

described, but at the same time, when really you listen, they talk to you about housing, water, the fact that there is no garden for their kids to go... When I work with people, you know, around, when I listen to what they say, they understand that their children will not have access to good school, they will not have access to a real childhood, that their children will be criminalised quite quickly, that they are either black or brown, they will be segregated, they will not be able to walk freely in the city, that some neighbourhoods will be forbidden to them, except as deliverers or cleaners. So they have a total understanding of the world in which they live. It's just listening and saying, "OK, what will be, then? "How do we organise around this issue? "How do we organise? What do we do to organise around this issue "and how do we effectively transform the political terrain?" And it's about... this matters a lot, and if we want another world, this has to be answered. You know, if there is no water, there is no life, no social life. There is none. It's not a question of... It's just basic. I mean, it came to me, of course, I have been interested in that for a while, but also when I read, as I say, you know, in the talk, when I read that after the floods in Pakistan, the NGOs arrived, not one NGO had thought that out of so many million people affected, you would have pregnant women.

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: Yeah.

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: So nothing was ready. And this is not... What explains this? It's totally banal to think there will be. It's banal. So why was this forgotten? Or why do, effectively, workers in the US have to wear diapers? You know? So for me, all of these different examples show the fact that these politics of degradation are part, it's a political question. It's part of the dehumanisation and racism or Islamophobia, the constant reminder that you don't deserve a good life, a decent life.

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: Yeah. And I think what concerns us the most is, then the right wing sweep in and they say, "We've got very easy answers to these problems. "It's your neighbour, it's the migrant, the reason why you don't feel..." And there's one thing I want to get back to, which is a crisis of men, specifically masculinity, that masculinity, the crisis of masculinity is causing all sorts of... ...you know, some of the biggest demographics supporting the rise of the far right, but also joining paramilitary groups, joining police forces, etc, or people who feel that this is the only way in which they can retain or reclaim a sense of manhood, specifically of a heteronormative type. How, with this obstacle and the easy answers of the far-right... I know it's hard to keep on coming back to this, but how do we advance an elemental politics but also have a vision, right? The older generations of national liberation, regardless of how difficult things went in the post-colonial state, had quite a coherent vision of what liberation would look like. I think

one of the things we are struggling with — me, for example, as someone who's incredibly pessimistic, considering the fact that I was one of many people who was very enthusiastic about the Sudanese revolution, and now I'm one of many Sudanese people whose entire family is displaced because of the forces of counterrevolution. How does someone like me, for example, develop a positive vision of the elemental politics of the type that you were talking about, the... "Living communism", was it called?

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I always, you know, because I was interested by that proposition by Zikode, you know, the fight that is saying, "If we don't have water, we need have water. "If we don't have toilets, we deserve toilets." So it's effectively these basic needs out of the ground for struggle. But to go back to the question of young men being seduced by this, and effectively we know that Javier Milei was elected by a majority of young men who identify with his machismo, and we could talk about so many other places. There are many things we could say about that. There is this book by Sayak Valencia, this feminist, a Mexican feminist, called Gore Capitalism, in which she analysed why so many young men at the border of Mexico to the US join the gangs and contribute to femicide and also the dismemberment of women that they rape and so on, and that they throw on the garbage pile. So all of this contributing to say, this is what we do to women, this is what we do to a female body, and so it doesn't go just with, you know, just one act. It has to be followed by deep degradation and deep cruelty, and she says that effectively we have to see that it's not what Fanon says, that these young men will embrace revolution and liberation. They embrace that because what has become if they want to become a man is through the capacity to kill. Are you capable of killing without... You know, without affect? Then you become a man. Then this is, you know, that... So we have... I mean, this is effectively fighting again that connection between death... You know, killing, and being strong and a man, that is also connected by these men who have no future, these young men who have no future. These young Mexican men along the border, they have no future, and that border is becoming more and more militarised on the US side, so the US side also is showing an incredible, you know, militarised masculinity. Men, you know, they cover it, tanks and drones and everything, so that very imperialist masculinity on the other side is weaker masculinity, but extremely cruel, that is effectively through the images and TV series we see, but this other also incredibly violent masculinity, since it wears uniform and is, you know, whiteness, but it's the mirror image of that on the other side of the border. And it also has to do with, you know, what we know, the collapse of the economy, the structural adjustment programme, leaving nothing. There is no job, there is no work, there is no future, like, none. And the young women can still be hired in factories, whether they are in Cambodia, Bangladesh or Mexico, the maquiladoras, you know, to do fast fashion or whatever. Men much less, but there is also through the organisation of racial capitalism globally now a way in which the masculine working class is not as needed as it used to

be, except, you know, perhaps in the mines of Congo, and so on. But so what is left? To join a gang or to join a militia, because then you will nonetheless have access to some income or at least through the power you have, you will be able to steal, to rape and to... So it's not a question just of masculinity that is in crisis, because otherwise we would just focus on just the gender aspect, but the way in which effectively the reorganisation of racial capitalism today does not need what constituted the working class, whether in the West or in the global South, because you did have the working class in Senegal or Kenya or Argentina. And so this is being totally destroyed by the reorganisation and the fact that what is needed is more very low-paid jobs, like the really... or gangs, so you are either a deliverer or you are a gang member, or you're out there, you know. And the fight that effectively what we have to understand, the two go together. So this is why also I kind of talk about slavery, because we think that slavery has been abolished, but slavery works with that. You have the two together. There is no contradiction. In fact, the working of capitalism requires that you have this, you know, enslaved, but requires also the gang, requires... In fact, these are the kids, I mean, but the gang who are at the head of this organisation have totally understood the capitalist system. They know how to trade, they know where to invest, they learn what are the rules of commerce, they invest and put their money in banks. You know, this is in fact the monstrous side, but they know how to do it. They have lawyers. I mean, they know how to work. They use in fact the tools of what are, but what they deal in is drugs or, you know, sex work or things like that. But the way they organise themselves and even the hierarchy they have and so on, it's a mirror of what exists. They are very smart. They look at how it works and they know also how to buy a certain respectability at one point, you know? They will buy art, they will become private collectors of art. You know, they will enter certain respectability and they will organise and you will have the members that you describe, these kids who, you know, will kill and have no clue, and will usually have a very short life, a very short life, and as you say also, will be those who are the small soldiers of smuggling people, who will effectively exploit people who want to just flee. So what we see, it's... I mean, there is no other way than to try to grab a piece of that economy, and to find where in all this which is offered, the one you can get, you know? You can grasp. So moralism will not get us anywhere, and so, the gang thing is very complicated, because sometimes, as you do know, in some places, they will also contribute to the social life of a poor neighbourhood, right? They will be protectors, or they will say, "OK, we will ensure order in this place." So all this has to be also looked at, because otherwise, we're going to get on the war on drugs, which is just, you know, has brought more violence, absolutely more violence and more militarisation. Much more militarisation.

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: Yes, and you mentioned Haiti. I think Haiti's an important case study. I'm also trying to get us to think more about the global South in the politics that we do and link that to some of the struggles we're dealing with here, because right now,

for example, Port Au Prince has been completely taken over by these kinds of groups which you're talking about, and at the same time, the imperialist response have just as much... which is, you know, the joint forces led by Kenya, but really led by the United States, have just as much been implicated in abuse and torture and sexual violence as well. So these different regimes of masculinity. And you link these things, which may seem very far off to also the crisis that people, particularly many young men who are the ones who are driving a lot of this shift to the far right, in the sense that, maybe in their parents' or grandparents' time, the Fordist family, the family wage, the man goes out to work and there's a housewife waiting at home with kids. That is materially impossible, and it also may be that material impossibility contributes to the vicious hatred of trans people today, because trans existence itself, of people saying "we will be comfortable being who we are "in a world where you're not able to be the promised... "The thing that society promises you," also creates a kind of crisis which turns into all of these things. So we understand in the conjuncture that we're in that we have no guarantees. We also understand that the absence of a politics of elemental basic needs is creating a vacuum which is leading to all sorts of stuff. That's a very bleak picture, obviously, of the world that we live in...

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: Yeah, but we have to understand that, for instance, that counterrevolution, I mean, there is a long counterrevolution, and they are a movement of intensity. This is very intense. But we could also perhaps suggest that it is so because of the incredible panic that has taken over the ruling elite. They saw trans people in the street, they saw, you know, young people for Palestine, like, totally challenging universities and putting their future on the line. You know, they saw feminists in Mexico and Argentina having no fear, attacking the police, also creating alliances with other groups in Argentina or in Chile and elsewhere, indigenous people claiming much more forcefully. A lot of activists in Central America and South America are indigenous people. So it was that coming challenge to patriarchy and racial capitalism, and also what happened in Palestine brought to light what, in a way, that has never been to that extent, I think, what is settler colonialism. So colonisation, settler colonialism, we have seen it is not 19th century. It is happening now. This is what we see now. So it's also part of the education that, you know, the young people are grasping, and so the return of the words "decolonisation" and "decolonial", that perhaps of course are right away grabbed by museums and other institutions, but, you know, it's not just that. We know the capacity of pacify and grabbing, but it's not just that. There is really something happening now. There is a shift, and that shift, I think, the ruling class are feeling it and are extremely panicking. There is a shift. I mean, there is something that is moving, you know? And so, of course they still have the money, they have the army, they go to the Gulf states, which offer them billions of dollars for whatever they want to do. They have weapons sent there, and the Silicon Valley is, you know, helping therefore to make more

and more sophisticated weapons. We know that. But we do know that they have been afraid by even the sentence "from the river to the sea".

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: Yes.

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: The word "Palestine". So, "decolonisation". So, the force, the strength that this has, we should also be aware of that. Be aware of their panic, the way, you know, they panic every time... There is panic every time a country has been independent, and had just done one thing. How do we endure that? How did we effectively betray all the revolutions in the Arab world, which were huge?

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: Absolutely.

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: Absolutely huge, or the one in Algeria. One million people every Friday in the street. And this cannot be forgotten. This has been there, you know? And, as I say, occupation of buildings by women in São Paulo and elsewhere in Brazil, or the encampment here of students. This is happening. Or even, for instance, some groups saying, "OK, we have to return to some tactic of the past, being more direct." So this is happening. This is also happening, and of course we would like things to stop. We would like genocide in Palestine to stop, and we would like to see the Israeli leaders being punished, you know, like they go too much with impunity. But we do know also that the West has no longer the hold it used to have. Nobody is... They are not dreaming of that. I mean, the story of human rights and so on, that we know what is human rights, and it's on our soil that feminism was born and human rights, and the idea of humanity... It's done. It's done. It's going to take long, it's not like that, but everything has taken long, you know? Everything has taken long. But it's there. It's there more than ever. I never saw them in the... It's really... I mean, like, ten years ago, you did not have so much conversation on settler colonialism. Anti-colonisation. And they are there now. Everyone saw what is going on and so on and so, of course, if we could look at that and see, you know, also the terrible things that are happening, but ideas, ideas are strong. Ideas have a strength. They have a strength, and, you know, as Toussaint Louverture was saying, you have uprooted the tree of liberty, but its roots are still there. You know, the roots are there. You have not taken the roots out. So this is, I think... Of course, I agree with you, because I don't want also to not acknowledge what I have seen and read, and there are moments, as I say, that... You know? But at the same time, I see young people, but also what I see when you were talking about generations, you know, and quite often, I see a lot of white hair in the room and a lot of young, very young people.

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: Yeah, I notice that too!

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: You know, and so the generation who march in the street and so on, I mean, you know, and Stuart, but also others and so on, and then very 20-year-olds. So something is happening. Something is happening.

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: Absolutely. And the counterrevolutionary violence is also strong. And it happens in many ways. It happens sometimes through war, through violence, but also through electoral manipulation. And I guess, then... So I agree with you — we have gone through the process of melancholy together, and now let's go into more tactical conversations. We need to have strategic and tactical conversations. A lot of people have tried in many different ways. Since 2019, there were uprisings in Haiti, which has been responded by gangs. There have been uprisings in Chile, which have been relatively successful, but then depoliticised. Exactly. And then there has been uprisings that have completely led to counterrevolutionary war, like Sudan. And then here, also, there was the rise of a movement, an electoral movement, which was also... But a lot of young people also say this. They say, "We tried the ballot, it didn't work. "Every time I've voted, nothing has happened. "Every time I've tried to organise for a revolution, "the counterrevolution was stronger." So a lot of people are starting from this position of defeat, but they haven't given up, as we see by the brave encampments, the people fighting their local counties to get the pensions out of the arms industry in Israel, etc. So in this moment of defeat, how do we build a politics of the elemental?

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: OK. One, I mean, I would also answer to the question of defeat, you know? I worked for ten years for the construction of a museum in Réunion Island. And we gave a lot of... We were like a team, 20 Réunionnaise and we were like... And it was absolutely exciting work. And it was totally defeated after built, fully defeated. I mean, everything was erased, all the archives were, you know, destroyed and so on, all of the work we have done with architects, with people and so on. It was... Pip! Disappear. Because the conservatives of the French state were against it. There was a local election, the conservative won. That same evening, they said, "this project will stop." So it was a total defeat. It was a defeat, there was no other word, because first, it was not built, and then everything disappeared. It was erased. Pip! So of course, a lot of, you know, depression, depressive thought, and then there was also a lot of threat in Réunion, so I had to leave Réunion and go back to France. And once I start to, I read an interview with Eric Hobsbawm, right, the historian, the Marxist historian, and in it — I

paraphrase, because I cannot remember exactly the words — but he said I have been faithful to an ideal of my life, which is communism, and it has been defeated. And he said, "but defeat sharpens the mind." It makes you think, and victory may make you complacent. And I said to myself, OK, let's sharpen my mind! You know? Let's understand why you lost, besides, of course, being totally... You know, like, "What to do?" You know, like, depressed. And it was quite... It gave me a lot of... Because I had to understand why. It was not just because the conservatives did not want it. How also forces that we thought would be our allies betrayed us, why they betrayed us, what was that. What in our project that we thought was so beautiful and so wonderful threatened the order? Why, you know, why effective we thought that what we thought was smart and quite intelligent was a threat, and why was it a threat? Not just because we were a bunch of Islamo-leftists for these people or wokeists or whatever. No. What was the idea that threatened, you know? And that was important for us to understand. It was not just a built museum, you know? Because after all, we would have been... some kind of multicultural blah-blah museum would have been OK. You know, with something about slavery that was bad because everyone now agrees it was bad. But what was... We challenged the colonial temporality. We said it's not French colonialism that gave us birth. We were born from the Indian Ocean. The people who were brought to that island came from very developed cultures, civilisations and social organisations. So our top priority and our speciality will be that, and France would be in the periphery, and that was too much. That was too much. And so, what we understood was, in fact, we underestimated to what extent we were threatening through that idea, and that the second idea was to have a museum without objects. We were threatening something very deep, something very deep. It wasn't just, you know, like... It could not exist. A museum could exist, you know, but not with this idea. You know? So this is also, I would say, about defeat sharpening our mind.

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: Absolutely.

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: You know? Like, it's an episode, and of course, the enemy... I mean, have we ever known a racist or a fascist say, "Oh, I'm sorry. Let's listen to you"?!

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: No!

[SCATTERED LAUGHTER]

No.

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: No!

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: I've been told that we've got a minute left, so we've got to shift, but basically — we may be defeated, sharpen your minds. And please, everyone, sharpen your minds, because it's going to get rough. And with that said, I would like to allow you all to show me your sharpened minds right now in the question and answers session. We've got one there. I'm having trouble...

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: You see something?!

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: I'm having trouble seeing, but we've got one there. Let's start there.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #1: So, is there a microphone, or...? Yes, a microphone.

STAFF MEMBER: To your right.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #1: Right. Thank you very much for the conversation today. And I just have two particular questions about... one, you mentioned freedom and opportunity... Yeah, well, you mentioned freedom and opportunity, and I was just wondering, what do you mean by those two specific things? The second question on my mind is the question of humanitarianism and where is this coming... Particularly where this question is coming from. Like, do you not see the benefits of humanitarianism, or can you dive deeper into the limits of humanitarianism as a political project?

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: Yes. And then I'll take... Yes, that one over there. I also need to see up there. I'm struggling... Sorry I have to do this, everyone! I may look like I'm a mime, but I'm just... Yes.

[INAUDIBLE]

OK.

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: We don't see it. We don't see it there.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #2: Hi. This is a question for both of you. How do you feel in your soul and your sort of spirit, and how do you personally feel, when you see institutions misusing the decolonial praxis specifically? So, art galleries when they totally defang it and then somebody stands on a stage and they talk about these things. How does it make you really feel, and how can we combat that? Because the rage is quite strong for people who work with that. Thank you.

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: OK. We've got one up there.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #3: Hi, hello. Françoise and Mohammed, thank you so much. I'm Joanne from Mauritius, and because we've talked about global challenges, fascism and things like that, and the environment, and the Indian Ocean kind of separately, I was wondering if we could talk a bit about how those global challenges of fascism, environmental problems, transphobia, masculinity and stuff, how does that translate in Indian Ocean worlds today?

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: OK. I guess we can take those questions... Oh, are you making...? Ah! One more, then.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #4: Yeah, it's just a quick one. I wanted to ask what your thoughts on Ukraine were, because that false equivalence is something that really bothers me, and I'd be really interested to hear your thoughts on it.

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: Do you want to answer to that one?

That one's a big one!

[THEY LAUGH]

Yeah, do you want to go for the...?

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: Do you want to?

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: I'll just go on the one question that was asked to me, and that's on the "decolonise". The ultimate idea of decolonisation was that colonialism must come to an end, and colonialism is a material, real force. It is not a parable, it's not some kind of... You know. It's a material force that has multiple different manifestations. It's economic, it's cultural, it's scientific. There are many ways in which these initiatives to decolonise this and decolonise that and decolonise this are quite legitimate. But we always have to remember that there are still people today who are colonised, who are fighting against colonialism, who are being killed in genocides because of that, OK, and this is happening not just, for example, in Palestine, but even in the French colonies. There are legitimate struggles against colonialism and neo-colonialism, which is the continuation of colonialism by other means, so in a world like that, I would recommend everybody who's decolonising to understand the urgency of addressing the very real colonial problem that exists today quite materially, and that's the precondition for a world where we're all happy, where we're all living dignified lives with shelter and a clean environment and dignity and freedom and justice. These concepts are very important. And with that said, you can go ahead.

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: Yeah. Well, thank you for this question. I apologise for the first question, because you will have to repeat it. I did not really understand, but I will go to the other question. How do I feel when, you know, misusing "decolonial"? Well, on one side, a rage, and on the other side, not very surprised, because of the capacity, effectively constantly... Again, as I say, the two things are always together — the repression, the criminalisation of pro-Palestine, an exhibition in the gallery — not all galleries, but some galleries will be about, you know, decolonisation. As I say, you know, some weeks ago in Paris, in the morning, the police brutally, brutally expelled 400 minors from sub-Saharan Africa who were occupying a theatre demanding that their rights be respected, which, as a minor, because France has signed the Convention on Childhood, will be to receive education, health and housing and protection. They were brutally expelled after that, and the same evening, Pompidou opened an exhibition on black Paris, and there was champagne and everything for all the black artists. So the two things are not contradictory. They are effectively describing what's happening. I

mean, always the two are together. They are not contradictory, so it's not like, oh, how can they do that? They can do both. They can do absolutely both, you know? And so the work is to go with effectively one sense, in the sense of art and culture, there are sites and places where things are being experimented and other propositions are being made. So they will always use... You know, they will... remember that Black Lives Matter, the day after, there was a load of platforms in the US were having that when you were opening their page. And then so on and so forth, but what they are afraid of is a practice of Black Lives Matter. The politics of Black Lives Matter. The politics of culture and art, that visual culture in so many other ways. The Indian Ocean, the global challenge, how it translates today... I mean, there is, for me, coming from the Indian Ocean, it's a very important ocean that has been a little marginalised because of the importance of the Atlantic paradigm in the way that we look at things, and because it was very important, of course, the slave trade, the Caribbean, South America, North America, they weighed heavily. But the Indian Ocean today is quite an important place, because this is where the oil goes through. It's also 80% of the maritime trade, and also, you have an incredible set, you have Sudan, you have the Suez Canal, you have the Gulf states, which are investing heavily, heavily in Africa, in terms of banking. You have Iran, which matters a lot, and so the Indian Ocean is one of the highest militarised oceans today, with India or so buying islands to set up maritime military bases. You have the Chinese, you have Australia, you have the French, British and the US, because they are the old powers there. So you do have effectively an incredible... it's also the ocean where the majority of Muslims in the world live. It's also an ocean in which the connections between Africa and Asia are millenary, long before the Europeans arrived in that place. So it's a very interesting ocean, and things today are about environment, contamination, and incredible increased militarisation. Increased militarisation and a lot of war — the war in Sudan, of course, but also wars that are not necessarily wars in the sense that we think, but private militias in northern Mozambique to protect the oil extraction, and you have deep sea extraction, which is going to, of course, destroy, and more talking about French colonies, you have Mayotte and you have Réunion Island, and Mayotte is a very important place also, in terms of, because it's a black and Muslim population there, and the way in which we see, the way in which the French have weaponised racism there which means that that population is attacking black migrants from the Central Africa and East Africa who are trying to find their way through Europe through Mayotte . So there are a lot of things going on. Madagascar is a very important place. A lot of extraction. A lot, a lot of extraction. So, yeah, this is all being played. Ukraine. Ukraine, it's... I mean, there are many things we could say about it. We know also why it was, you know, the question of NATO there, but also the question of the idea of Great Russia by the government of Putin offers you some kind of dream, you know, illusory dream, some kind of fantasy, and everyone wants great things — Great Russia, Great China, you know, all these things. So that's also the question of the militarisation also of the society. And also... But Ukraine... What we see, that they have a leader who is received

everywhere, who is listened to, and the contrast, of course, with Palestine, is huge, is absolutely huge. Recently, again, there was a lot of moments the UK Prime Minister and many other leaders of Western Europe met to support Ukraine, and in the meantime, as we are talking today, I mean, this morning, Israel's state launched what they called a Gideon offensive to definitely, definitely destroy Gaza, and you don't hear a thing. So this kind of double standard is why, then, just to talk about Ukraine? The double standard has become really an important conversation in the world today. The feeling that there is a constant double standard is very, very strong, and it's legitimate. It's totally legitimate. So we have to talk also through that, why this will be discussed, will be the art of discussion about peace and militarisation and incredible demand from militarisation by the open state, and, of course, the fact that nonetheless it is being destroyed. But one thing again: in February 2024, the Palestinian Ministry of Culture denounced the destruction of museums, historical and archaeological sites in Gaza. Practically all of them are in ruins, and there are even some collections we don't know where they are. The place was used as barracks for the Israeli army, when a place where you had 4,000 archaeological objects. Where are they? We don't know. Probably they are already being trafficked. In the end, there was not a word by any major Western museum. Not a word of protest. Whereas, as soon as the Russian invasion started in Ukraine, UNESCO offered help with digitalisation and protection — which doesn't mean that Ukraine does not deserve that, because effectively a lot of historical sites are being destroyed in Ukraine and there is no reason, but the double standard again. You know, Palestine has no longer... there is no one museum standing. There is no church, mosque standing today, and there are no major protests, and UNESCO has been quite silent, or very quite prudent about that. So this is also what we have to talk rather than just saying the words "Ukraine", "Palestine", as if are both are then... "What do you say about that one and that one?" And so... But I'm very sorry for the first person, for the person who asked the first question, because I did not really understand it, so I cannot answer, but perhaps later you will ask me and I will answer. I'm sorry.

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: Yeah. OK. So we've got one there... Ooh, there's lots!

[HE LAUGHS]

AUDIENCE MEMBER #5: Thank you so much for the space. I do have a question about political praxis. I'm here upstairs. Sorry, not very visible! I have a question about political praxis and the ability to sustain ourselves in order to seize the present. I'm wondering if we... Two things, basically, that are related. One is this idea of practising politics without guarantees. To me, it also sounds dangerously close to a neoliberal logic of risk-taking,

or kind of brings, basically, this very colonising force of neoliberalism into the picture of taking over certain terms of self-care, self-fulfilment, realising and embodying certain values, right? And then, related to that, I mean, the question to that is, like, how do we sustain a telos that is ethical and does not get colonised or co-opted by neoliberal logic? And related to that, earlier, you mentioned the crisis of masculinity, and my colleague and I, we both had to chuckle a bit, because actually, is it really a crisis, or is it kind of like the consequential outcome of what we are seeing of that neoliberal logic that constantly invites man to live up to a certain masculinity, that they should, you know, embody, cultivate and be out there in the world, right? So again the word "crisis" here seems interesting. if it's not already kind of a buying into a neoliberal rationale, as opposed to, like, neoliberalism being really good at work, right? And with that, of course, also inherent to it, a certain kind of fascism.

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: Mm-hm.

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: OK.

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: Yeah. Another question?

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: Yeah, we'll take two more, because we are running out of time.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #6: Hello. My turn? OK. Thank you for the talk and for your conversation. I had a question that actually dovetails nicely with the one that just went, and it's about... Well, I wanted to ask you if you could parse out "politics without guarantees", right? Because it sounds like it could be a really nice blurb, right? But from Stuart Hall, from the clip we started with and the way Stuart Hall lays out what he means by "politics without guarantees", seems to me to be something quite particular, and as I was listening this evening, or this afternoon, there are at least two different definitions that I could sort of pull out in the way that we were using that phrase. One was thinking politically, organising politically, being in community, and trying to develop a strategy without laying out the imaginary that we're working towards, right? Deciding in advance what would happen. And then the other one was that we are currently living in a situation of politics without knowing what would happen, right? So that we are under conditions of politics without guarantees, and these are two very different renditions of the same phrase. So if you could please parse that out for us, that would be great. Thank you.

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: Hi.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #7: Hello. Sorry...

STAFF MEMBER: One more.

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: Yeah?

AUDIENCE MEMBER #7: Hi. Thank you so much for the conversation and the talk. As a Gen Zer, technology has been embedded in my day-to-day for a long period of time, and we're hearing reports of people having ChatGPT-induced psychosis, and currently, changes are happening to UK law, copyright, when it comes to AI. When I go on TikTok, it's quite sad to see people using that algorithm and hacking it to address material needs, from people in Gaza to people dispossessed in the West, and essentially having to become marketeers and dropping content trends to address their material needs. Could you please expand on how we need to build capacity so we don't underestimate defeat or counterinsurgency, especially if technology platforms such as TikTok prevent this type of organising, and just the general thing of techno-fascism? Yeah, thank you.

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: It will have to be the last question.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #8: OK, so shall I ask mine? Yeah. So I'm coming back to the material for today, where it says that... "Possibilities for re-appropriating the present." So, the present, I'm going to ask you a question about the presence of climate change policy. So I use anti-blackness to interrogate climate change, and when I walk the corridors of power and they use the language of climate justice — and it's right that we think about the global South, but as Sivanandan said, there are black communities here. We're here because they were there, and yet, we're invisible and we're erased from climate policy. So how do we reappropriate that in our present? How to get back into this language of climate justice in policy and practice here, protecting our black communities that live and are at risk from climate hazards here?

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: Great. Could I just answer the question on politics without guarantees? Just because I did think the politics without guarantees question was so important. The main idea is basically that there's nothing in our biology, for example, which naturally brings us together politically. You have to build alliances, you have to think tactically, you have to think strategically. There is nothing in history, there's no promise in history, that you will win, which was the teleological idea that animated a lot of the liberation struggles of the past. There is... And once you know that, once you know that you're not necessarily going to win and that there is nothing natural about political organising or political formations or even senses of self, senses of group collectivities, what do you do? I think that that, for me... and then finally, when it comes to seizing power, it's not clear what power is or where it is. You don't know if it's the state, you don't know if you just take over the parliament building or if you take over the radio station, that you've won. Power seems a lot more complicated now. I mean, those are some of the main ideas that Stuart Hall writes about in his article Marxism Without Guarantees, and so for everyone, that's recommended reading for after this. Read that piece, it's really good.

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: OK, so something... A lot of movements, once they won, they were confronting the difficulty of building new institutions, and most of the independent states went on with what existed already — parliaments, this, that, elections. And the difficulty of imagining different institutions... Not to say "new", you know, kind of... But different institutions, and that confrontation is always the most difficult thing. And so we can look at what has been tried and why it failed or why did it work, but sometimes we think it failed because of the way they were fought, but they failed because of outside forces also. The structural adjustment programme destroyed universities, destroyed the universities in the global South, destroyed them, absolutely destroyed them. And there were some of them, you know, in Dar es Salaam or whatever, were absolutely extremely important universities, where effectively what we call decolonial curriculums were being experienced, with a different way of teaching, a different... So this question also, "without guarantees", is also, once we're there, like, to do something and how to do it has also been a very urgent question. And we do know also that, for instance, when the Belgians left Congo, there was just one school and two teachers. I mean, I'm exaggerating, but this... particularly that. And when the French left Algeria, there were also, you know, like three schools and three hospitals. So there is... I mean, you're confronted when you win, when we win, with both the legacy of incredible destruction of the environment, of people, of infrastructure, of institutions, and the need and sometimes the impatience of, you know, "What are you doing? We want things." And so, for me also, the "without guarantees", like, to really be aware of that and confront the reality and the difficulty of building something new. Not new in the sense of the boss-boss-boss, but something that effectively answers the people's need. People

fought for that, they want it, and they thought that, OK, independence will at least bring, mostly, education, health and work, and when you read most of the decolonial manifestos or anti-colonial manifestos, this is what they offer. Besides independence, besides building a nation, establishing the border, saying, OK, this is going to be the new nation state, I mean, when we look, it's a very detailed programme, very detailed manifesto, and then they are confronted by effectively inside and external forces. So for me, with that guarantee is also that, that we will have to confront that and besides, effectively, there is, you know, biology and there is no necessarily promised land. But there is a promise. Perhaps not the promised land, but the promise. But that promise, to fulfil that promise, there has been extreme difficulty, and as I say, giving the example of Haiti, everything was ended when the South tried to do the South-South exchange, to not go through the North and to establish a trade regulation or whatever, it was broken, it was beaten. I mean, everything was... "You will not do." Even OPEC, you know, was effectively attacked. So if we don't also look at that, and this is also what we have to look at. And the question of the crisis of masculinity, I don't think... I mean, we did not use it in the term of, I think, of what you meant, but I insisted on the question of neoliberal vocabulary that what is offered also by the neoliberal economy to young men and to men, and how... What is, how masculinity is conceived by power, and we have an incredible image of it and representation today as we speak.

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: Françoise, sorry...

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: OK, We have to stop?

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: Yeah.

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS: I have to stop, OK, I have to stop!

[THEY LAUGH]

OK. Sorry, sorry, sorry. OK, well...

MOHAMMED ELNAIEM: Yeah!

[APPLAUSE]

ORSOD MALIK: Let me try this one. Hello? Oh, there we go! Hi, everyone. Thank you, Mohammed, thank you, Françoise. Before I introduce Selina Nwulu and Alice Kanako's 15-minute visual, The Audacity of Our Skin, some notes of gratitude. So, thank you, Françoise, for your talk, for your words, your generosity. And thank you as well for reminding us about opening up new dimensions of meaning which have not been foreclosed by systems of power which are in operation currently and also in the past. Thank you to Mohammed for guiding the conversation with such care, and thank you to you all, everyone in the room and online, for joining us and staying on a sunny Saturday afternoon. I mean, that's no small feat! Thank you. And a deep thanks to our event contributors, Neon Books and Skin Deep. Please do stop again by Skin Deep's pop-up library and feel free to flip through their back prints, and works from collaborations and inspirations from the last ten years of their operations. And thank you to the most incredible hosting partner, Conway Hall. Thank you to Glenys and team, and Holly. You really are just brilliant partners, so thank you so much. And thank you to our funders — Hollick Family Foundation, Power of Pop Fund, Comic Relief, Paul Hamlyn Foundation. And thank you to Words of Colour, the brilliant Heather Marks at the back as well, for helping us promote this event. And to Harriet Fleuriot, the Foundation's Head of Programmes, thank you so much, and to the rest of the team. And this year marks the 10th anniversary of the Stuart Hall Foundation, and it's an invitation to extend and activate Professor Hall's legacy through ongoing collective engagement. Tonight marks the beginning of that work in 2025, and I hope it leaves you not only with questions but with a sense of possibilities in times of foreclosure. If you'd like to support the work of the Foundation, please do chat to us after this if you feel so inclined, and I also want to thank Selina Nwulu and Alice Kanako, who we commissioned to provide a visual presentation of Selina's revisited poem The Audacity of Our Skin, which we are about to show to you all before we begin the reception. Please do stick around for the reception. There is food, there is drinks and hopefully very good conversation as well, and, yeah, we hope you enjoy the poem, and afterwards, please do stick around. Thank you, everyone, so much. Cheers.

[APPLAUSE]