

Transcript for Season One, Episode Five
Developing a Critical Lens:
Teaching About Religion in the Social Justice Classroom

Nana Osei-Kofi 00:08

Welcome to Transforming the College Classroom. This is a podcast for anyone who is interested in taking up teaching and learning in higher education from a social justice informed perspective in ways that are centered on a deep commitment to teaching all students. My name is Nana Osei-Kofi. I'm Director of the Difference, Power, and Discrimination program at Oregon State University. And I'm also Associate Professor of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

Kali Furman 00:34

I'm Kali Furman, I'm a postdoctoral scholar with the Difference, Power, and Discrimination Program.

Bradley Boovy 00:39

And I'm Bradley Boovy, associate professor in the School of Language, Culture, and Society at Oregon State. And co-facilitator with Nana of the DPD Summer Academy, where we work with faculty who are developing and teaching DPD courses.

We're recording this at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon, located within the traditional homelands of the Mary's River or Amphinefu Band of Kalapuya. Following the Willamette Valley Treaty of 1855 Kalapuya people were forcibly removed to reservations in Western Oregon. Today living descendants of these people are a part of the Confederated tribes of Grand Ronde Community of Oregon and the Confederated tribes of the Siletz Indians.

Bradley Boovy 01:16

We're here today with Kryn Freehling-Burton and Dr. Amy Koehlinger. Amy and Kryn, to start things off, could you introduce yourselves to our listeners?

Amy Koehlinger 01:24

Kryn, do you want to go first?

Kryn Freehling-Burton 01:27

Sure. This is Kryn. I'm a Senior Instructor in the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies program at Oregon State, and I teach a lot of our general ed, baccalaureate core courses, quite a few of which are DPD classes; and I also coordinate our e-campus program, so I work a lot with instructors, a lot of graduate instructors who teach DPD classes for our e-campus majors and minors; and, yeah, do a lot of mentoring and working with that kind of course development, etc. I'm a mom, I live in Portland, I have some cats and a garden that I'm starting to plant again for the year.

Bradley Boovy 2:14

A beautiful, beautiful garden.

Amy Koehlinger 02:17

Hi, I'm Amy. I'm an associate professor in the School of History, Philosophy, and Religion, and my research looks at intersections of religion and American culture, with issues of race and embodiment, and I teach one particular DPD course on religions in the US... I'm actually teaching it this quarter and next quarter, and also I'm a parent and an avid gardener, and I love Kryn's garden.

Kryn Freehling-Burton 02:50

Oh, Amy, yours is phenomenal.

Bradley Boovy 02:53

Yeah, I feel you both have amazing gardens. I'm always so envious and just, I don't know. They're such great spaces, and yeah, yeah. Cool.

Nana Osei-Kofi 03:02

Great. Hi, this is Nana. I'm co-hosting with Bradley today, and so what we're talking about today is a chapter that Amy and Kryn co-authored, titled, "Religious Bias, Christian Privilege, and Anti-Muslimism in the Difference, Power, and Discrimination Program". So, tell us a little bit about your chapter. What does it focus on? Thinking about it from a teaching and learning perspective, what did you want to achieve with it?

Amy Koehlinger 03:30

So, I'll jump in. This chapter is a presentation that Kryn and I used to give at least once a summer for a couple years, to faculty and administrators who were learning about DPD issues. And so, we kind of had our shtick down for presentation, and then transferred it into a written format for this chapter, but in that presentation we moved back and forth between our two perspectives and expertise, and thought about how religion becomes part of this larger

constellation of issues in DPD thinking about education, and how in particular in the United States, that there is a kind of bias towards Christianity that is implicit often; and at the time when we developed this talk, the anti-Islam component of society was pretty strong, so we were also addressing that.

Nana Osei-Kofi 04:34

Hmm.

Kryn Freehling-Burton 04:36

Yeah. So, I think a little bit of the struggle of translating what we did in a workshop to a chapter was the workshop-y kinds of things that we did, with some little quizzes, and conversations, and kind of more hands-on stuff, with some video clips and book chapters that they read, that then they discussed in the time we spent together. But, it was fun to imagine how someone else might look at this content and adopt it, and perhaps use it in different contexts, or in different kinds of classes.

Amy Koehlinger 05:13

And my favorite part was always when you would read from Robin Wall Kimmerer's work. That was just my favorite part of those entire sessions we used to do.

Kryn Freehling-Burton 05:22

It's such a powerful story. We would have them read, and then we would read aloud... Sometimes I think we varied it, depending on what we were feeling. One of the first chapters in her *Braiding Sweetgrass* book, called Sky Woman Falling, where she tells the creation story that is common in the Great Lakes region of North America, and how that fundamentally shifts the ways that we start thinking about our relationship with the earth, our relationship with other human beings, and to kind of shift... To ask people to think, "What happens if we start from a different place, and not with the fall of humankind and a banishment from a garden?" That then sets up all kinds of interesting ideas about gender relationships, and relationships with other people, however other gets defined, and how that sets up a way of thinking about difference and how that plays out, then, in our societies in all kinds of ways.

Amy Koehlinger 06:39

Well, it was super effective, because I think the work that it does is it both de-centers Christian, kind of deep cultural mythologies, but also I think makes people aware of how those are operating when you're presented with an alternative to your cultural assumptions. All of a sudden, you become aware that there is this sometimes, this very Christian-oriented foundation to how people think.

Nana Osei-Kofi 07:05

[Crosstalk] Yeah, that's... Sorry, I know we were jumping here to take that... It's just that it's really, really powerful, and I think part of what you said about starting from a different place made me think about African-American history and how folks typically want to start at slavery, and what it means to start prior to that, as well. I just thought about that as a parallel. What I'm curious about, you said that you presented some of this work prior to writing the chapter. What kind of responses did you get when you would work with faculty on this?

Amy Koehlinger 07:41

Kryn, I'll defer to you.

Kryn Freehling-Burton 07:43

Yeah. It was pretty varied. Some people were just... There's a lot of silence after experiencing Kimmerer's work, in particular, just kind of absorbing those ideas and thinking about what it means for the work that an individual is doing, like what kind of research work they're doing, how they present these ideas, and in a classroom getting students to think about difference from other perspectives.

I think sometimes the struggle is how do we... There were a lot of questions, like what do we do with this? How do we make evident that we're shifting the ways that we're going to approach things, when our university calendar is based around a Christian calendar, right? Those kinds of things. And we're not going to change, but what might that look like in our classrooms when we're presenting information?

For instance, I'm teaching about the movie, Aladdin, this week in my Disney class, which is a DPD class. So, students come in with these... I mean, everybody often comes in with these ideas that there's the single narrative, that this is what we've always seen in our visual media, in our music, through the media, and how do we shift out of those kinds of assumptions about other people from those shifting places? So, I think that's the most challenging thing. It's like, "Okay, this is really awesome, and I think it's important, but what do I do with it?" How do I enact it? How do I do it in the class? How do I shift my own pedagogy to recognize how those things are playing out in the classroom, when they're not spoken or they're not visible?

Nana Osei-Kofi 09:37

Right, yeah.

Amy Koehlinger 09:40

Yeah, and for me... And this is actually in the chapter, that in that presentation... For me, it's a disciplinary mode also, because my primary field is religious studies. And so, one of my early

contributions, both to the structure of the chapter, and to Kryn and my presentations, is to introduce the perspective of religious studies, which is very purposely neutral about the concept of religion, and instead of thinking about religion as a source of morality in society – religion is a good thing, or religion is a source of violence and discord, or religion is a bad thing – to try to think neutrally about religion as a very powerful social force, and instead of trying to bring evaluations to it that are moral or ethical, instead just think about religion as something quite powerful that we need to take seriously, and to see it the way that it's operating in our society.

Nana Osei-Kofi 10:40

Yeah, that sounds like, I imagine, a challenge. [laughter] So, I guess I'm curious, maybe, to hear a little bit more, because it is something that students come in... Or, I would say, most folks come in with, then they have judgements about this, and they're not thinking about it, seeing it as a social force, and especially, too, I would imagine, if students are taking courses like this early on in their academic careers, that those ways of understanding the world might be stronger than those that have done some academic work and are maybe in their final year, or something like that. How do you navigate that in the classroom?

Amy Koehlinger 11:31

Well, for me it's been a really interesting transition, because I spent the first 11 years of my academic career teaching at Florida State University, which is pretty clearly Bible Belt; and then transferred to Oregon State University, and so when I was teaching at Florida State, I often, in introducing a religious studies perspective, would have to help students understand that they could let go of their faith perspectives, or as we say in the discipline, bracket them, practice epoche, to bracket those perspectives and allow themselves to adopt a kind of critical, academic stance in thinking about it, mostly because students wanted religion to be this primary good social force in society, and then when I changed up Oregon State the work became almost exactly the opposite, which, demographically it makes sense. Oregon has a much higher percentage of people who claim no religious affiliation, and so more of my students here... in fact, the majority of my students here... were deeply skeptical about religion. They saw it as superstitious, they saw it as dangerous.

So then I had to do a different adjustment, which was to help those students understand that their biases against religion are also things that could impede them from really being able to take religion seriously as a social force. Like, okay, I get that you see religion creates discrimination, but let's also try to think more systematically about how and why that is, rather than just thinking that religion is bad for society.

Nana Osei-Kofi 13:11

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Thank you.

Bradley Boovy 13:14

Yeah. Yeah, I mean, it's... Thank you so much for sharing that. Also, I just want to kind of come back around to thinking about what you mentioned in terms of disciplines, right? Because, as you both talked about when you introduced yourselves, you both work and are trained in different disciplines... Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Religious Studies... and so, I'd just like to hear a little bit more about how that informed your collaboration on this chapter, how it informed your approach to talking about social justice pedagogy in the context of the Religious Studies classroom, or in the context of a Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies classroom... and then, maybe talk a little bit about some of the challenges and the benefits of working across disciplinary boundaries. So, both in terms of how you teach these things, how you approach religion, but then also in thinking about how you approached your writing and collaboration on the chapter.

Kryn Freehling-Burton 14:10

It was so fun, and I felt a bit of a loss this week, actually, teaching, because I was like, "Oh, oh, this is where Amy would come in, so how do I shortcut?" I mean, it's a slightly different focus than what we would do in our workshops, but it was really fun to... the setup that is present in the chapter, of this narrative we have in the United States about Christianity, and how false that narrative that we're usually exposed to is, is really a helpful setup. And then, to think about Christian bias and... So, going back and forth was such a fun way to show that interdisciplinary approaches to a topic.

In Women Gender Studies, we're super comfortable positioning ourselves and troubling the idea that there are ways to be unbiased, right? We're like, "Well, no, we're always biased," and there's always bias present, and if we acknowledge our social locations and where our bias might be present, we're more likely to interrupt that and have it not interfere with the ways, for instance, that we ask questions, and the ways that we design research or interpret data. But this is not usual, and so Amy and I had a lot of conversations about how to navigate that where I'm like, "Ah, we..."

I do a lot of positioning. I found my way to my discipline through thinking about feminist theology and asking these kinds of really deep theological kinds of questions. And so, I just have been in spaces where that's been more easily done or easily accepted, or understood, and that's not the tradition that Amy comes from. So we're like, how do we balance it so it's not too weird between the two of us, but also give a little bit of a clue how those traditions do impact the way that we teach and the ways that we disclose or don't disclose things in a classroom.

Amy Koehlinger 16:35

And I found Kryn's comfort with a certain kind of transparency to be very... I just learned a lot from it, because again, the norm in my field is to be a little more circumspect about allowing

students, especially, to see your background and your commitments, because there's this fear that they will then not be able to trust your kind of academic neutrality or rigor about it.

But, Kryn and I both come from within Christian traditions that were not particularly supportive of women's voice or autonomy, and both of us had to find our way into thinking about religion through paths that wouldn't have been sanctioned, I think, by the communities that we came from, and Kryn's ability to talk about that I found super refreshing. I just don't, as a rule, talk about those issues of my background with my students, and I could see the value when Kryn would talk about that, and when she would reveal those issues. Then it was really helpful and challenging to me. And then, Nana, thinking about the... Or, Bradley, thinking about the other question that you raised about how this applies in the classroom, one of the things I've been thinking a lot about lately is that when we did these presentations and wrote these chapters, it was before January 6th.

And so, I've actually changed some of my teaching since I wrote this, and since we did these presentations, because the people in my field are beginning to look very seriously at Christian nationalism, so that the mythologies that we address in the chapter and in our presentations, we highlight them, but we have a much clearer sense now, I think, as a scholarly community, about how those mythologies have been weaponized, and weaponized in very recent American history, and for white supremacist ends, for anti-democratic ends, and how those mythologies are not just latent, they're very active and are, I think, gaining strength.

And so, this chapter, to me, if I could go back I would add some of that, but it also, I think, just underscores how important and relevant thinking about religion is, when we think about power and oppression in the United States. Religion has now become an overt political force that is not in the interest of justice, most of the time.

Bradley Boovy 19:19

Yeah. And how, Amy... I'm just curious how have students responded? I think it's a really interesting moment, like you said, to be having this conversation after January 6th. How have you noticed a difference, and actually, for both of you, noticed a difference in how students have responded to thinking about religion or your kind of prompting them to think critically about religion, and specifically Christian privilege or Christian supremacy in the United States, in the US context. Has there been a change in the way they respond to these conversations or the way that they respond to even just naming Christian privilege as a major factor in US American society?

Amy Koehlinger 20:04

Well, thinking about the class I'm teaching now, and I did notice that students are paying attention in a different way, and seeing contemporary resonances that they might not have seen before. So, when I talk about the religious orientations of the founders, or, I would say, the lack of religious orientations of the founders, and the mythologies that most Americans

learn growing up, which really are not based in historical fact, and we think about why those mythologies exist, and who they benefit, and where they came from, and students were able, now, I think, to see more connections to a current public discourse about this than they had in the past.

And also, recently, I'm in a unit on revivalism and Utopianism, and in talking to them about the nature of revivalism and the second great awakening, and what happens in the emotional and affective lives of people who are attending revivals, my students almost immediately made a connection to watching Trump rallies on TV. So, I guess it's reassuring for me that often I don't have to make those connections explicitly if I set up a space for them to think about this, they make the connections and bring them forward in the conversation.

Bradley Boovy 21:26

And, Kryn, have you noticed changes in response specifically around these topics in any of your teaching?

Kryn Freehling-Burton 21:33

Not explicitly, and I don't... I don't spend as much time as Amy does in her classes on these kinds of topics, so I see it in a more general way. Certainly in 2020, in June of, end of May, beginning of June 2020, I did see a huge shift in what students really wanted to talk about in the class. I didn't have to, like, "Okay, come on. Let's talk about race," and I didn't have to tempt them along to this conversation anymore. They were asking questions in a way that they hadn't been in those really intro kinds of classes, and wanting to be involved in addressing it, and being there I had a ton of students... a surprising number of students... that spring term, basically take time off of class to participate in the protests, and being present and listening to what our communities of color right here are asking of us, and that seems... And that is definitely new.

I haven't seen as much of a response out of the January 6th insurrection. Not quite so much. Although, I have noticed over the last four years a definite... that students were just much more willing to recognize the importance of having these conversations and learning from others about how to engage in communities, and in society in kind of larger ways than before. They see it affecting their lives much more immediately than, I think, the previous 10 years of my teaching, I had noticed.

Bradley Boovy 23:32

Yeah, absolutely.

Kryn Freehling-Burton 23:33

And I think the importance of.... thinking about how to present these kinds of ideas without Amy with me all the time to lay out that beautiful... the history is not beautiful, necessarily, but

this beautiful presentation of how we actually got to where we are today, and how these things are interrelated, the ways that... I find, and this is definitely disciplinary specific, to focus on a variety of narratives, including a lot of personal accounts. YouTube is fabulous for this, right? There's great fairly short videos, or even longer ones.

I mean, my goodness, my students watched a, what, 16, 17-year-old... oh, maybe even older... Edward Said's On Orientalism talk, and they're just as moved by that in seeing that just image, after image, after news clip of examples of these ideas that we have in the West about people from the East, that students are like, "Whoa!" And it's so old it's relevant again.

It's fascinating, because students are like, "Oh my goodness!" And they're making connections that, yeah, 10 years ago I couldn't get students to make. They're like, "Oh, but that was back in '95. That Oklahoma City Bombing was way back then, right?" And not seeing the connection with today. Even post-9/11, they weren't willing to go there in a way that they are now. They're like, "Oh yes, and here's another example, and I just saw this in the news," and the remake of Aladdin as a live-action movie, they're talking about, "Ooh, is Disney listening?" And why did they change things? Is it just to check off some more boxes so that they are seemingly listening, or is it evidence that we're shifting the needle of conversation?

I mention in the chapter, the Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Danger of a Single Story" video, and we watch that in all of my classes, that has a strong media studies/pop culture focus, and that's really powerful, to just then always go back and say, this is why we need to hear multiple people's experiences. We can't just rely on what we see in a two-minute news clip. We need to read things, we need to see things, we need to engage in lots of ways with communities to disrupt that notion that there's only one kind of Muslim, that there's only one kind of person from West Asia, or Middle East, or North Africa, and that's really helpful to disrupt those single narratives.

Amy Koehlinger 26:45

And I was thinking, as you were talking both when you started and said you were wishing for my presence with you in the classroom, and then the importance of having multiple voices, and I was thinking the same thing often, that I feel like my classroom... I mean, the chapter I s based on presentations we gave to administrators and professors, not to students, and how I wish our universities were structured to allow for team teaching the model, the kind of conversation and multiplicity of perspectives. That would make our DPD classes so much better.

Bradley Boovy 27:20

Yes.

Amy Koehlinger 27:21

If it could be structured somehow that the conversations we have in these other spaces could be brought into the classroom and modeled for our students. That would be just excellent.

Nana Osei-Kofi 27:31

Right, yeah.

Bradley Boovy 27:32

Absolutely. Yeah.

Nana Osei-Kofi 27:33

Yeah. I was thinking a lot about co-teaching as you were talking, and what I'm curious about, having presented together and then having done this writing together, from those two experiences, do you have any recommendations or thoughts and ideas for faculty that do want to co-teach, and maybe have the opportunity to co-teach and come from different disciplines? Are there things that you learned about the process that might be helpful?

Kryn Freehling-Burton 28:02

Well, food is important. We should always do this stuff over food. [group laughter]

Bradley Boovy 28:07

Yes.

Amy Koehlinger 28:08

That's true. And sometimes beverages.

Kryn Freehling-Burton 28:11

Right. [laughs] Sitting in gardens, we actually worked on a lot of this chapters in your garden, Amy.

Amy Koehlinger 28:16

Yeah. [laughs] Yeah, be in a good setting. One thought that I had... it's not about this conversation, but again, our university structure especially... and kind of current budget situations... are not necessarily always about the best pedagogy-

Kryn Freehling-Burton 28:35

Right.

Amy Koehlinger 28:36

... but about other kinds of... how many credit hours can you produce, and things like that.

One model that we tried in my unit is, of course, we called Critical Citizenship, where we had a rotation of... I was the person who was there every week as a kind of host, but we had a different professor each week talking about kind of both being critical of the concept of citizenship, but also thinking about what essential basics do people need to know to kind of interact constructively with American culture, society, and governance. And so, that was a really great model. Again, I had to teach it... I mean, it was not a course that the university wanted to think of as an in-load course, so... but it was a really effective model that people listening could make that available, or could try to transition that into their own institutions. I thought that was incredibly effective for students.

Nana Osei-Kofi 29:38

Mm-hmm (affirmative), mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, I think there's always something so powerful about having students have the opportunity to see multiple faculty and that get multiple perspectives at the same time, and recognize that we don't always agree; we're not into some sort of group think, that all faculty have the same ideas about things.

Amy Koehlinger 30:02

And also learning from each other. I mean, one of the things I enjoyed about that in my conversations with Kryn, too, is just that I get to show how excited I am to learn things from my colleagues, too.

Nana Osei-Kofi 30:14

Mm-hmm (affirmative), mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, yeah. I mean, we're just way too siloed in so many different ways, institutionally.

Amy Koehlinger 30:23

Yeah, for sure.

Nana Osei-Kofi 30:26

Yeah. The other thing that I was thinking about as you were talking about bringing new content into the classroom and being responsive to the current context, for faculty who want to do that, who want to bring these types of things to the classroom but may not be in religious

studies, do you have any suggestions on, or ideas, recommendations, how they can stay current? What are the particular resources that they might seek out as a way of being able to do this in their classrooms?

Amy Koehlinger 31:02

Hmm. I'm thinking about that. Kryn, do you have thoughts while I'm gathering myself?
[laughter]

Kryn Freehling-Burton 31:11

I mean, the thing I rely on myself quite a bit is watching pop culture critics because I try to pull in so much pop culture kinds of things, so... and particularly for Women Gender Studies classes, Bitch Media's work is really helpful because its' a... started as a zine, and now it's a quarterly magazine that was created to be a feminist response to pop culture, and they've done such intentional work on their board, and on their staff, and the interns that they bring in, that it's... They have such a brilliant BIPOC and disability focus, queer focus in their coverage, and I get a lot of... Even if it's not directly about the topic, I often get ideas about how to approach a topic from the ways that their writers are covering stuff.

Nana Osei-Kofi 32:20

Great.

Kryn Freehling-Burton 32:21

And then, other places-... Teen Vogue is amazing.

Nana Osei-Kofi 32:26

Oh, that's right. That's right.

Bradley Boovy 32:28

Yeah, so much good stuff.

Kryn Freehling-Burton 32:29

They are... I'm so sad they're not in print anymore, but their online content has always been really powerful and challenging, and... I mean, they were covering stories back in 2015 that major news sources weren't covering, and they just continue to do that, a lot of really great stuff about cultural appropriation, for example. We just link right to Teen Vogue and look at that kind of stuff through their lens, and it's, you know, for on-campus classes especially, it's right in the demographic of our first and second-year students. So, that can be really helpful.

Nana Osei-Kofi 33:12

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kryn Freehling-Burton 33:14

Did you think of anything, Amy? Because I need more stuff for your stuff.

Amy Koehlinger 33:21

Yeah. I love your recommendations. I'm thinking about folks who really are not religiously musical, to think about what would be helpful for them. I mean, The Conversation, which is a place where scholars share short pieces that respond to current events from their disciplinary expertise is really pretty good. It's called The Conversation, and you can do searches for there in religion.

There's a group called The Religious Studies Project, which also has podcasts, and presentations. There's a group called Religion for Breakfast that does the same thing. And then, there's groups like The Center for the Study of Religion in American Culture at Indiana University, Indianapolis; and then, The Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions. It is just outstanding in having lots of programs that are available on Zoom about really current topics. So, last year their focus was on psychedelics; and this year their focus is on white supremacy and Christian nationalism in the United States, and they've had just amazing speakers.

So, and on that topic... I mean, really, there's so much scholarship coming out right now, but Anthea Butler's work on understanding white supremacy and evangelicalism, and now Anthea's work is continuing to think about Christian nationalism, specifically. I think it's just field-changing in how she's approaching that, so I would look at the work of Anthea Butler.

Nana Osei-Kofi 34:59

Wow, wow. Excellent resources. That's fantastic.

Amy Koehlinger 35:04

Yeah.

Nana Osei-Kofi 35:05

And the other thing that I heard that I don't want to lose sight of either, Kryn, you were saying earlier, you were talking about going back to older sources. And so, it seems like that might be an important thing to consider, as well, that we can actually go back to older sources that have powerful... have explanatory power in the present.

Kryn Freehling-Burton 35:26

Yeah.

Nana Osei-Kofi 35:27

It's not that we don't always need new shiny objects to help us understand the present... It's a both/and, but I think... I just wanted to add that there. Fantastic, thank you.

Amy Koehlinger 35:38

Well, I was thinking of something that's not new or shiny, but is super powerful, is last night I was up in Portland to hear Brit Bennet, who's a novelist, talk about their novel, *The Vanishing Half*, and someone... one of the people asked her to talk about her books that stay with her, and she thinks are helpful, and the first thing she mentioned was James Baldwin's *Go Tell It On The Mountain*, and my students are just getting ready to start reading that next week. That is one of those... I mean, that novel is quite old by the standards of our literature, but I think it's one of the finest novels in American literature, and provides this really very nuanced... as all of Baldwin's work is... this very nuanced insight into the way that religion operates both as a source of liberation and oppression in people's lives, and how religion can actually be doing both at the same time. It's a really spectacular book for that.

Bradley Boovy 36:42

Yeah, yeah. Fantastic. Thank you both so much; this has been a really great conversation. I just, as we kind of start to wrap up, I wanted to see if there was anything, any last thoughts... You've shared a lot with us today, but are there any last thoughts that you'd like to leave with our listeners and with us before we close?

Amy Koehlinger 37:04

I don't know. I kind of want to hear your voices more, Bradley and Nana.

Bradley Boovy 37:07

[laughter] We're going to have our... Kali's going to interview us in a couple weeks, so you know.

Amy Koehlinger 37:11

Okay, good. [laughter] Are there things that struck you about this chapter, or things that you thought could use more engagement? Was there anything that kind of made you go, "Hmm."

Bradley Boovy 37:32

No, no. I mean, I think I do... I remember the conversations that we had around positionality, right, and the different disciplinary kind of responses or approaches to thinking about how we locate ourselves in relation to our work, and I thought that was really, you know, having that conversation both in the workshop... I mean, also for me, because I'm also... I mean, I'm trained in German studies, right, language and literature, which, similar to religious studies is this... It's this kind of very conventional discipline. It doesn't come out of the history of activism, where you just kind of... There's this illusion that we disappear in our work, right?

And so, so I remember thinking a lot when the two of you were having that conversation and sharing that conversation with the group in our workshop, our workshops to put the book together, just that being a really, really generative moment for me, as well, and how powerful it was, also just for those of us who are trained in kind of more traditional disciplines. I mean, the other thing I was thinking when Kryn was talking specifically about the other... We talked a lot about Christian privilege today, but the chapter does a really good job, too, of addressing anti-Muslimism and anti-Semitism, both of which are, again, on the rise in the US.

So, I think... what I loved about what you were saying, Kryn, and also what you all talked about in the chapters, in your chapter, is that it's really about... and I think this hopefully comes across in all the chapters... social justice pedagogy is not just about content. It's not just about, "Okay, yes, we have this historical moment that we're going to look at," or, "Yes, there's this going on in pop culture that we're going to look at." But it's also about developing a particular critical lens that we hope to leave our students with, that they can then apply... as you were mentioning, Kryn... to an older text or to something that's happening right now, that they can make connections between around anti-Muslimism going back, well, hundreds and hundreds of years, really, in the history of the West, right? But that they are then able to kind of make those connections.

And so, I think your chapter does a real... And also coming out of the collaboration, your chapter does a really, really good job of showing that. So yeah, I really enjoyed the chapter, and I've also enjoyed kind of reliving some of the conversations that we had around it in the workshop. Yeah, I don't know. Nana, is there anything-

Nana Osei-Kofi 40:00

Yeah, no. I agree with everything that you said, absolutely. I think the only thing I would add is that I think that conceptual shift from Islamophobia to anti-Muslimism is a really important one, and so, we haven't said that much about that. I don't know if you want to say anything about that, but I think that that-

Bradley Boovy 40:18

That's a great one.

Nana Osei-Kofi 40:19

... yeah, that's just really, really powerful to me.

Kryn Freehling-Burton 40:23

Yeah. And it is, in itself, a teaching tool, because I find that most students have heard the term Islamophobia, even if they're kind of fuzzy on what it means, but to have that conversation about language, and about naming and how it comes out of this place of the importance of having a term to capture an idea and a way that oppression takes form, and yet how it can itself be problematic and harmful to communities around disability and thinking about mental illness and mental health... but also the ways that then that centers Islam as a religion in a way that that's not usually how oppressive, particularly public oppressive and violent behaviors actually take form.

It's on these weird ideas about race and how that intersects with religion, and so teasing that out and saying anti-Muslimism allows us to talk about that, the nuanced ways that we actually live our identities and we live our social positions all the time, and how that impacts the ways that we experience discrimination and oppression and violence directed at a particular group.

Nana Osei-Kofi 41:50

Yeah.

Amy Koehlinger 41:51

Podcasts are funny, because you can't see me nodding my head vigorously as Kryn is talking.
[laughter]

Kryn Freehling-Burton 41:56

Right.

Nana Osei-Kofi 41:57

I can feel it, I can feel it.

Amy Koehlinger 41:58

I wish there was a head nod sound that you can make, like, "Yeah."

Kryn Freehling-Burton 42:01

I also like the conversations we had about anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism, and the importance of that nuance, and being clear in different spaces, in different ways, that one or the other might be more appropriate.

Amy Koehlinger 42:19

Yeah.

Nana Osei-Kofi 42:21

So true.

Bradley Boovy 42:22

Yeah.

Amy Koehlinger 42:22

Yeah. And again, as Nana pointed out, bias against people with Jewish descent and connections is still, it's still very present in our society.

Nana Osei-Kofi 42:39

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Amy Koehlinger 42:41

And teaching students how to identify the more or less coded ways in which some of this bias and bigotry is translated in the current moment I think is really helpful and effective.

Bradley Boovy 42:53

Yeah, absolutely.

Amy Koehlinger 42:54

Yeah.

Bradley Boovy 42:55

Well, thank you both so much for sharing, your spending some time with us, sharing your thoughts on your chapter, and also just kind of offering such a really kind of expansive and generative perspective on teaching religion in social justice-oriented classrooms. Thanks so much.

Nana Osei-Kofi 43:13

Yeah, thank you both.

Amy Koehlinger 43:15

Thank you as well.

Kryn Freehling-Burton 43:16

Thanks for having us. I love how this project just keeps allowing us to spend time together.
[laughs]

Bradley Boovy 43:21

Yeah.

Nana Osei-Kofi 43:22

It does, it does. And for those of you listening, in our next episode we'll speaking to Charlene and Erich about their chapter, which deals with educating for wholeness and sentipensante pedagogy. So, we hope you'll tune in. Thank you.

Bradely Boovy 43:38

We'd like to thank Orange Media Network and their podcast director Jen Dirstine.

Kali Furman 43:43

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Nana Osei-Kofi 43:55

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