

Episode 4.23 Being a Demon Bitch About Justice

June 26, 2020

- Hannah McGregor: [00:00](#) [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans] Hi, I'm Hannah McGregor and this is *Secret Feminist Agenda*. And I want to begin by giving you a heads up that I'm planning on taking a little bit of a hiatus from *Secret Feminist Agenda*, maybe for the rest of the summer. I have a big book project that I'm working on that I really want to have the time and energy to really commit to and focus on that work. And I also just need a moment to re-energize and sort of re-centre on what I want to do with the rest of the season of this podcast.
- Hannah McGregor: [00:46](#) I'd like to think a little bit more deliberately about who I want to talk to in the final episodes of the season, which might end up being the last season of the podcast, it might be time to move on from this project. But, that's not a decision I want to make right now at the nadir of my energy levels. So I'm going to take a little hiatus and hopefully come back energized and with a clear sense of focus in August or September.
- Hannah McGregor: [01:18](#) If you're looking for some more feminist rants, though, I will never stop recommending the *Sandy & Nora Talk Politics* podcast and Alicia Elliott just announced that she's planning on starting a podcast as well. So, honestly, there's lots of feminism to go around. No need for scarcity feelings about feminist podcasting. But since this is the last minisode that I'm going to be making for a little while, we're going to return to our core *Secret Feminist Agenda* value and talk about just being a huge bitch. [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]
- Hannah McGregor: [01:53](#) So I've been thinking a lot lately as conversations—necessary conversations—are circulating right now about white people needing to do the work on ourselves, to grapple with anti-Black racism in particular, white supremacy in general, and of course our own complicity and participation in these systems. It's not a coincidence right now that some of the top-selling books are books that are kinda like workbooks for white people who want to learn how we're complicit in white supremacy. And that kind of work on yourself is important work. Undeniably.
- Hannah McGregor: [02:31](#) And at the same time, I keep coming back to this page in Lindy West's book *The Witches Are Coming*. I'm going to quote from it a little bit. She writes, "We don't need neutrality. We don't need nice. It's not enough to just stop being terrible. We need a new work that actively challenges old assumptions, that offers

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radical models for how to conceive of ourselves and how to treat each other." And she continues at the bottom of that page, "Whatever your sphere is, however big or small, you get to make choices within it. And if you care about healing the wounds of the world, I hope you become a real demon bitch about diversity and never let anyone sleep. Think radical thoughts and let yourself imagine they're true. Then ask yourself why it's considered radical to make art that accurately reflects reality, to build a society that takes care of its members, to demand a better world."

Hannah McGregor: [03:28](#) I've come back to this phrase over and over again, this idea of becoming a real demon bitch about diversity. Becoming a, a demon bitch about anti-racism, a demon bitch about feminism and social justice. For me, it's so different from the kinds of corporate statements about inclusivity and diversity that we've been seeing coming out all over the place lately, the kind of idea of inclusion as the logical end point of liberalism, that our institutions have good foundational premises and have just gotten a couple of things wrong, but don't worry we'll do better and soon everybody will feel included.

Hannah McGregor: [04:16](#) And there's something so wildly insidious about that logic. I've been feeling this—I'm not sure why—but I've been feeling it particularly in relation to the conversations about publishing's whiteness in Canada, as though it's an accident, as though it's not how a whole industry was built. Though of course, the university is, is exactly the same. White supremacy in the university as an institution is, is absolutely one of those cases where it's a feature, not a bug. And I'm not convinced that we can remake the university into an anti-racist institution.

Hannah McGregor: [04:57](#) But what I keep coming back to as I'm, as I'm thinking about this moment and the kind of work that's happening and the kinds of conversations that are happening, is the absolute insidiousness of civility as one of the operating principles in, well, a lot of cultural organizations like publishing, like universities, like I'm sure many others that I haven't worked in or worked on personally. Civility is the tacit demand that we relate to one another in particular ways, that we might offer critiques or point out problems, but always in a way that prioritizes the comfort of those being critiqued or the maintenance of the status quo.

Hannah McGregor: [05:52](#) Civility is the reason why we don't speak up when we see something happening that we know is wrong. Why we don't say anything when somebody we know is toxic or abusive or racist or harmful is quietly allowed back into our community with no

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actual evidence that they've been held accountable for the harm that they've caused. Civility is our silence in classrooms, at conferences, in meetings, online, when a white person in a position of power says or does something awful, and we say nothing or speak quietly, privately, because we don't want to be uncivil. Civility is not speaking up when, you know, for a fact that a white woman in the publishing industry has been gaslighting young women of colour, but you don't want to be known as even more of a problem than you already are. Civility is when you witness something terrible being said to a young Black scholar who you admire and care about, but don't say anything because your supervisor is sitting in the room and if it was appropriate to say something, well, she'd have said something.

Hannah McGregor: [07:14](#)

Civility is the way we quietly ignore harm and violence because we're afraid of speaking out of turn or of getting into trouble. Civility is tied intimately to whiteness. Demands for civil discourse, demands for certain kinds of behaviour are one of the powerful ways in which white supremacy maintains itself in lots of different environments and institutions. Civility is the guise in which the first person of colour leading a major political party in Canada is punished for naming racism out loud because it's uncivil, as though the naming of the racism is the problem and not the racism itself. And I think civility is a trap that white women in particular fall into. A combination of fear of punishment and a core-deep complicity with the silencing that is fundamental to how white supremacy operates.

Hannah McGregor: [08:15](#)

I know the work for a lot of people at this stage is going to be looking back and noticing those moments when you were silent, those moments when you were complicit through your silence, but that can't be it for any of us, right? It can't begin and end at noticing complicity. The next stage has gotta be being a fucking bitch about it. The next stage has gotta be naming it and speaking up and being so incredibly unbearable about justice that things change just 'cause people want us to shut up. And if we get in trouble and if get punished, and if we lose opportunities, that's fucking great.

Hannah McGregor: [08:59](#)

We've got to care more about demanding a better world than we care about our own comfort. We've gotta be so fucking furious and excited about justice that the comforts of silence become disgusting to us. We've got to lose our taste for civility.

Hannah McGregor: [09:24](#)

Racist systems are a thing that white people are gonna keep saying "yes" to every day through inaction and consent until the day we start saying "no." And say "no" again and again and say

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"no" at every opportunity and saying "no" until you're such a fucking pain in the ass that half the people in your industry won't make polite, small talk with you at the next wine and cheese. You've just *gotta care more* about justice than about being liked. And I'm talking to myself here as much as I'm talking to anyone. [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]

Hannah McGregor: [10:04](#) Alright, let's take a look at our Killjoy Survival Kits. [Sound Effect: Chest Creaking Open].

Hannah McGregor: [10:11](#) I got a beautiful email this month from Maggie who is based in Saint Paul, Minnesota and shared with me some of what it was like being on the ground there in the days following George Floyd's murder. Maggie writes about the protests that were organized, about the violence of the police in retaliation against those non-violent protests, and about the rise of attacks on immigrant- and BIPOC-owned businesses and community organizations, including the loss of a centre for empowering native youth. The email goes on to talk about the terror of a militarized police force moving in on these communities.

Hannah McGregor: [10:55](#) And I want to read one paragraph to you, which reads, "If there's any time for us to use the tools we've gathered in our survival kits, it is right now in this place. And while the news is focusing on the terror, our communities are bringing their survival kits together to clean up, collect, and distribute supplies to those who need them and prepare for what's to come. The sidewalks outside of drop-off points are lined with bags of food, household items, and medical supplies. Neighbours are working sun-up to sun-down to help clean the damage and board up vulnerable businesses. People are putting their bodies on the line to protect each other's homes, businesses, and sacred places. So at the intersection of two pandemics, COVID-19 and racism, we find ourselves at a terrifying tipping point in this state. Our communities have come together to grieve, take action, and support each other, physically, mentally, and spiritually. We will need these continued actions in the days to come."

Hannah McGregor: [11:49](#) And the email concludes, "At this moment, while the sun goes down, the only thing I can do is pull out the most important tool I have: hope." Thanks so much, Maggie, for your email and thanks to everybody who is out there protesting and organizing, fighting to defund the police, fighting for justice, for Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, and all of the other Black people who are being murdered. Killjoys need other killjoys to survive. [Sound Effect: Chest Slamming Shut]

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Hannah McGregor: [12:20](#)

Don't forget to check out the show notes and the rest of the episodes of *Secret Feminist Agenda* on secretfeministagenda.com. You can follow me on Twitter @hkpmcgregor and you can tweet about the podcast using the hashtag #secretfeministagenda. If you want to send me an email, you can do that at secretfeministagenda@gmail.com. The podcast theme song is "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans off their album *Chub Rub*. You can download the entire album on freemusicarchive.org or follow them on Facebook. *Secret Feminist Agenda* is recorded on the traditional and unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations where I'm grateful to live and work. [Sighs] This has been *Secret Feminist Agenda*. Pass it on. [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]