

Episode 4.30 Thinking Intergenerationally Toward a Future with Eugenia Zuroski

December 4, 2020

Hannah McGregor: [00:00:00](#) [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans] Hi, I'm Hannah McGregor and this is *Secret Feminist Agenda*. And I've got a wonderful conversation to share with you today. But before I do that I want to say goodbye. This is the final episode of *Secret Feminist Agenda* in its current iteration. I talked at greater length in the last minisode on saying no about why [Laughs] it's ultimately for the best that this project is coming to an end in its current form. And of course, I've also talked about how I'm imagining a different kind of life for this work, particularly thinking about how *Secret Feminist Agenda* might become an opportunity to mentor other scholars who are interested in trying their hand at this kind of work. But as it currently exists as a space where I experiment in the use of podcasting to work through my own ideas and to engage with new ideas via conversations with other feminists, the project is, is done.

Hannah McGregor: [00:01:20](#) And I feel like there's a lot of things I could say to wrap things up today, but as I was re-listening to this conversation and editing it, something really stuck out to me, which was the sound of my own disillusionment with the university as an institution. And while that disillusionment absolutely holds institutional critique of the university and how it works is really fundamental to my own practice as a feminist scholar. I also want to, I suppose, have a moment of optimism here to say that making this podcast and engaging in conversations with the many brilliant, fascinating people who have joined as guests and getting to know the listeners on social media or through the reviews has gone a significant way to not only maintaining my passion for the work that I get to do as an academic and an intellectual, but has injected a new sense of purpose and value into that work.

Hannah McGregor: [00:02:25](#) *Secret Feminist Agenda* has been the project that has moved me from being a graduate student into being a more established academic. You know, I'm going up for tenure next year. I am emerging no longer. I suppose one might even say I have emerged. And this podcast has been the thing that helped move me through that process and I think will continue to inform all

of the work that I do going forward. I was recently reading some comments on Twitter by Grace Lavery, a wonderful scholar of Victorian studies who recently won the North American Victorian Studies Association Award for Best Book for her book *Quaint, Exquisite*. I'll put a link in the show notes as per usual, but she shared her comments on winning this award on Twitter. And I found the comments really moving, particularly in terms of how she was thinking about the value of what we do as humanity scholars. Grace Lavery is not one to wax poetical about the universal value of the humanities.

Hannah McGregor: [00:03:29](#)

She's — well, she's a lot smarter than that. But she had this to say about humanistic work. She said, "The work we do is really two kinds of work, which we too often synthesize into a single activity. Humanistic study, comprises discovery and interpretation. Find something out that nobody knew before and say something interesting about it. These skills are so different in fact, that we often prefer to do just one or the other to exhibit something unknown with minimum editorializing or rapaciously to theorize material already well understood. The former leads to what we might reactivating a now quite dead polemic call positivist historicism. The latter leads to a strange inflation whereby literacy in the realist novel whether Gothic or Victorian Orientalism is somehow positioned as a political end in itself. As though a smart enough reading of *Wuthering Heights* really might end capitalism. It won't. So the question is, do we adjust our goals or our methods? I propose the latter. Jonathan Eburne has suggested that one of the great merits of our profession is that even when we have a really bad day at work, nobody dies. I find this kind of deflationary thinking more revolutionary than almost anything else."

Hannah McGregor: [00:04:48](#)

And as I was reading these words, I thought to myself, yeah, [Laughs] that's kind of, that's kind of the deflationary thinking that has informed a lot of this project. In the sense that realizing that one of the radical possibilities of this kind of work is that you can mess up. You can make mistakes, you can try something and it could not work. And if that's the case, it means you can try really radical things. You can try really weird things. You can try things that nobody else has tried before. You can break things apart and put them back together in a different form and see what happens.

Hannah McGregor: [00:05:24](#)

And if it didn't work, you can just break them apart again. *Secret Feminist Agenda* for me has been a project in breaking apart the way that I do things and putting it back together otherwise and seeing what came of it. And for me, what came of it is a really deep commitment to feminist scholarship, to expanding the

sense of who the audience for these conversations is, of collaboration and conversation as an always exciting and enriching mode in which to do intellectual work, and of podcasting as a really exciting medium in which to experiment with what we think scholarly communication can be. And those are all things I'm going to keep experimenting with and failing at hopefully as long as I'm lucky enough to do this work. All right, that is enough preemptive nostalgia on my part. So, without any further pause, let's meet Gena. [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]

- Hannah McGregor: [00:06:30](#) Eugenia Zuroski, you can call her Gena, is a writer, scholarly journal editor, and associate professor of English and Cultural studies at McMaster University. An American of Chinese, Polish, and Italian descent, she has been a resident of Canada living in Dish with One Spoon Territory since 2009. Her scholarship focuses on race, empire and Orientalism in British literature and culture of the long 18th century, as well as on how those enlightenment structures of thought continue to operate today. She is editor of the journal *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* and a founding member of The Bigger 6 and BIPOC18 collectives, which are committed to transforming the scholarly fields of 18th century and romanticism studies from coteries of white privilege to sites of anti-colonial refusal. Under lockdown she has also published essays on PJ Harvey and Ling Ma's novel *Severance*, and has a poem out in *Columba* with three more on the way in *Room*. She doesn't miss the morning commute to work, but she misses karaoke very much.
- Hannah McGregor: [00:07:31](#) [Gena's Theme Song: "Head Over Heels" by The Go-Go's] Okay. Hi, how's it going?
- Gena Zuroski: [00:07:49](#) It's going pretty well. I mean, not going well at all [Laughs] but -
- Hannah McGregor: [00:07:54](#) [Laughs].
- Gena Zuroski: [00:07:54](#) -within that, it's going okay.
- Hannah McGregor: [00:07:58](#) Yeah. I just recorded the intro for the episode that's going to come out this week. So we are recording quite far in advance. We are recording the week of the US election. It is Thursday, November 5th, and we are all still just waiting to find out. Yeah. Like, I don't know whether there's going to be a civil war in the US?

Gena Zuroski: [00:08:23](#) Exactly. Like I just, it's such a weird week because on the one hand, nothing has changed exactly. I mean that's part of the problem is like, literally nothing has changed even though we held a whole election.

Hannah McGregor: [00:08:37](#) Yep.

Gena Zuroski: [00:08:37](#) But also it's not like anything is happening right now that hasn't been happening for a long time. And yet, because of the ritual of elections and the energy that we are conditioned to, like gather around it as an event this week has just, it's like, I felt, I suddenly felt the weight of everything that's been happening in this really direct way this week. And it's like a weight you can't climb out from under [Laughs]. It's a really weird.

Hannah McGregor: [00:09:17](#) Yeah. Yeah. It feels, it feels very heavy. It feels very despairing. I think the sort of [Laughs] the badness of both the options is part of what makes it feel like, on the one hand we've got a disaster possibility, and then on the other hand, we have still pretty bad.

Gena Zuroski: [00:09:40](#) Yeah!

Hannah McGregor: [00:09:40](#) But maybe, but maybe not as bad?

Gena Zuroski: [00:09:43](#) But like, yeah, maybe a slightly less terrifying —but also then I, you know, and then I get suspicious of my feelings where I'm like, maybe it's bad of me to concede that one of these disasters is less terrifying to me than the other disaster. Like I just — there's no, there is no good way to feel about what is happening right now [Laughs].

Hannah McGregor: [00:10:10](#) [Laughs].

Gena Zuroski: [00:10:10](#) And, and I don't know, like I'm American, I'm I, so I I've been living in Canada or what's currently called Canada for 11 years and I'm a permanent resident, but I'm still a citizen of the US and -

Hannah McGregor: [00:10:23](#) I didn't know.

Gena Zuroski: [00:10:24](#) - Yeah. So my family is — I grew up in Rochester, New York, just across the border from here. And my sister and my mom are living in Rochester right now. And I haven't seen them since January of last year. And I have another sister who lives in New Zealand, which you know, is great for her cause they're doing okay. Relatively okay [Laughs].

Hannah McGregor: [00:10:49](#) The intensity with which I'm like, could I go to New Zealand? Is that cheating?

Gena Zuroski: [00:10:54](#) Right. But, but also, you know, she feels farther away than ever.

Hannah McGregor: [00:11:02](#) Mmm. Mm-hmm.

Gena Zuroski: [00:11:02](#) So you know, this pandemic year has also been a year of being very suddenly separated from my family. Not having any idea when the border is going to open up and we're going to be able to, you know, cross over and see each other, which is just a very casual thing that we did.

Hannah McGregor: [00:11:20](#) Yep.

Gena Zuroski: [00:11:20](#) And watching the news in the US like every hour, every part of it, it's like, it's always translating to me on some level as like, Oh, this border is not going to open up for a year. Oh, the border is not going to open up for a decade. You know [Laughs], it's like, I'm thinking about— it feels like my, you know, my family is being like taken further and further away from me the more the country goes down [Laughs]. So, yeah -

Hannah McGregor: [00:11:50](#) Yeah.

Gena Zuroski: [00:11:50](#) - It's, it's not great. It's not great.

Hannah McGregor: [00:11:52](#) It's, it's not. It's really hard. It —everything about the pandemic and about the current political situation, I feel, you know, has separated —it has made what were before spaces that felt like they could be broached with ease, suddenly feel really, really big and really, really far. Tell me about your relationship to hope. I've been thinking a lot this week [Laughs] about what it means to have a, a sort of critical and informed and feminist relationship to hope, which is something that I am often so suspicious of because it comes so often packaged in this sort of very like shielded toxic positivity that's like, well, you know, no matter what we're going to get through this. And like, I mean, a lot of us know, and I think particularly people of colour know, we, don't always, we don't always get through this.

Gena Zuroski: [00:12:50](#) Lots of people do not get through it.

Hannah McGregor: [00:12:53](#) Lots of people don't get through it! So what does it look like you to, you know, what do you, do you feel hopeful or is that a thing that you foster?

Gena Zuroski: [00:13:02](#) Yeah, I — this is something that I've, I do think about this a lot because like you said, hope is one of those terms that is so aggressively appropriated by, by liberal discourses. And you know, it's like, it's like diversity and inclusion, right. Which is an area in which I've been, I've been kind of, you know, drafted to, to do a certain amount of work for institutions, as well as, you know, against institutions under those rubrics. And so you learn very quickly, I think — you learn to be suspicious of how those words get weaponized against actual transformative change. That the kind that, that would give people [Laughs] that people hope for, right.

Hannah McGregor: [00:13:52](#) Yeah [Laughs].

Gena Zuroski: [00:13:52](#) Or gets weaponized against the reality of, of the things that people hope will happen. So I think, you know, one of the things about hope that I try to remain vigilant about when I use that term myself, with myself, and with others, is this idea that if we're talking about radical hope, that's something that has to be earned, right. Like you, I feel pretty strongly that we deserve hope, but we, but we come to deserve it by earning it, by working towards it. And that, and that work comes in so many different forms. You know, I feel like Black people, Indigenous people, people of colour, LGBTQ+ people, disabled people, like we, and they have all been earning it all along, right. Just by living under conditions that are designed to deprive you of, of hope for your yourself, you know, for your own survival, your own flourishing, and your own future. So that's a form of — like that that has already been earned. So marginalized populations of people, I think it's, it's really important for us to cultivate ways of maintaining hope because, because it's earned, it's deserved. But when I see it being appropriated for the perpetuation of, of systems of power, you know, that have -

Hannah McGregor: [00:15:25](#) That are killing us.

Gena Zuroski: [00:15:26](#) - that are killing us! [Laughs] You know. That are, you know, that are extremely violent. I, yeah. I just, I can't, it's disgusting actually. That's a hope that has not been earned. I don't want people to be allowed to hope that, that they will never have to reckon with the kinds of violence that we're all living with, but some people have to feel and, and know more than others. You know.

Hannah McGregor: [00:15:59](#) Yep.

Gena Zuroski: [00:15:59](#) I don't hope for — [Laughs] I don't have space for people to hope to be shielded from our shared realities.

Hannah McGregor: [00:16:08](#) You, you make me think about a challenge I have encountered with this podcast project in particular time and again, which is that I like to talk about things like care and hope and gentleness and kindness and joy. And that, that is so quickly and easily appropriated by people who would like all of the gentleness and care and joy without any of the work. [Laughs] And the ease with which people say, like, "Oh I love your podcast. I love when you talk about gentleness and self-care. I really need a reminder to take breaks sometimes. Didn't love that episode about what white supremacy, made me feel bad. But otherwise, big fan." And I'm like, "Oh no, no, no, [Laughs] no, no, no. No."

Gena Zuroski: [00:16:50](#) Take it all. You get —you have to take it all in.

Hannah McGregor: [00:16:54](#) Not only do you have to take it all, but like there's no hope without grappling with white supremacy. Like there is —what, whatever thing you're calling hope that you think is outside of actually just being up against the conditions of the world. That's not hope!

Gena Zuroski: [00:17:11](#) Yeah. Yeah. I actually — you just gave me this, this, like this idea that I've never had before, but I'm going to try it out, out loud. It might be -

Hannah McGregor: [00:17:21](#) Ok.

Gena Zuroski: [00:17:21](#) - it might be a garbage idea, but we'll see. But I was just thinking like, sometimes people use the word hope when they mean wish. And like, for example, when people are like, you know, "Oh, I hope I hope this isn't racist." But it's like, "No. It is." You wish it weren't racist because you wish that this thing that you think "we're not racist", but it is. You can't hope for that. That's [Laughs] like, you can't hope for realities not to exist. And I think that's a really hard thing for, I mean, for like white people, you know, not all, not all white people, but many, many people.

Hannah McGregor: [00:18:01](#) Eh probably all white people, realistically.

Gena Zuroski: [00:18:03](#) Yeah. You know, it's like, you have to, I think to wrap your mind around hope, you have to dedicate some time to thinking about temporality, you know, and like your relationship to histories, right. Your relationship to the present. And, and, and let that inform how you build a relationship to the future, which is what hope is, right. Hope is the name for relating to a future of some kind. Like it, it doesn't work like a wish. You know, you can't just like hope out of nowhere. You have to do the work of understanding, like where we've come from, [Laughs] where we

all are right now, where you are in the middle of all of that, then you can start to like, build your hope, right.

Hannah McGregor: [00:18:47](#) Yeah. Yeah. That hope has to be married to action, it has to be married to will. That it can't just be a sort of ephemeral — I mean, wish it's the perfect way to put it [Laughs]. Like fingers crossed! Like no, no, no, that's not how change happens. We don't cross our fingers and wish.

Gena Zuroski: [00:19:06](#) Yeah. No. It doesn't work that way.

Hannah McGregor: [00:19:08](#) So tell me about some of your own sort of practices of hopefulness. I'm thinking in particular about the relationship between hope and planning -

Gena Zuroski: [00:19:18](#) Mmm.

Hannah McGregor: [00:19:18](#) -which does seem to have this shared sort of future oriented ethos to them.

Gena Zuroski: [00:19:24](#) Yeah, yeah. Yeah. So the planning stuff, the planifesto project that I've been doing with Lucia Lorenzi has really — that's one of the best things that I have found myself doing in the last couple of years. And she and I were talking recently about, you know, how funny ha ha like, you know, devastatingly funny it is that when we started this project, we really were just like, "hi, I'm a nerd who buys too many notebooks and I like stickers, and I don't know you very well, but I think you're really cool and I want to be friends. And so I thought maybe we could be like journal nerd, friends, and like talk about planning". And we like bonded immediately over this. And then as soon as we started offering like our first workshop, which was really supposed to be like, "here's an app on your phone that can help you schedule things in a way that won't make you feel like you never have any idea what's going on. It's a practical tool for being a professional academic." It immediately, because of who we are, became this like manifesto about reclaiming our time from the institution that is trying to like suck our life energy from us. [Laughs] And we -

Hannah McGregor: [00:20:45](#) [Laughs].

Gena Zuroski: [00:20:45](#) - had this group of like 20 grad students who had all brought their, like, their like nice notebooks and pens. And they were so into it. They were just like, "YES! [Laughs] It's a movement!"

Hannah McGregor: [00:21:02](#) [Laughs].

Gena Zuroski: [00:21:02](#) Totally an accident. It's just that, like, we have feelings about things.

Hannah McGregor: [00:21:07](#) Just accidentally radical.

Gena Zuroski: [00:21:09](#) Yeah, accidentally radical. And it all came out. But once it came out, we realized what we were really thinking about, you know, like we had, we had managed to pitch and get time from the institution to run a workshop on, you know, like time management and productivity skills. And instead what we were doing was using the tools like the material tools, pens, notebooks, you know, calendar applications, whatever the tools are. And we're retooling them like towards critical methods of reflection on how the academic institution and how the academic profession structures, our lives [Laughs]. our time, our mental space, our relationships to one another toward very particular ends that are not for us. They are for power that doesn't serve us. Right. And how do you reclaim those things? Like, how do you re— how do you reconfigure all those areas of your intellectual and personal and embodied life so that you can do your work in a way that yields the value that you want it to yield?

Hannah McGregor: [00:22:31](#) I mean, how?

Gena Zuroski: [00:22:33](#) It sounds like a cult talking about it this way, but it's very earnest. Like that's earnestly what we're doing.

Hannah McGregor: [00:22:38](#) I mean it's really working for me. I would like to join this call, please tell me how.

Gena Zuroski: [00:22:42](#) [Laughs] We'll send you an email.

Hannah McGregor: [00:22:43](#) [Laughs] I mean, it's so, it's so powerful. That language, there's a reason why that phrase, like "I am reclaiming my time" became the kind of meme that it did because I think it speaks so powerfully, you know, one to those of us who work within an institution like academia, that so desperately wants to spread out and claim the entirety of your life and that, and that a lot of people, I think who, for me, at least the vast majority of the people who mentored me, the people who taught me are people who, enthusiastically lacked boundaries around their work. Who took pride, right. That, that being an intellectual means that you will never, ever, ever do anything outside of your work because your work is being an intellectual, so if you stop working for a second it means you stopped being intellectual. And then what are you?

Speaker 3: [00:23:36](#) Right. What are you?

Hannah McGregor: [00:23:38](#) Just a lay person!?! [sarcastic]

Gena Zuroski: [00:23:40](#) Exactly. [Laughs].

Hannah McGregor: [00:23:40](#) Disgusting. [Laughs] But it is also, you know, a condition of capitalism that it would like to own and consume a hundred percent of our time and ring us dry and own our empty husks. And then throw us into the waste bit of history.

Gena Zuroski: [00:23:57](#) Seriously. It's like, why? I mean, one of the things that the planifesto practices, and when I say practices, I really just mean like learning to doodle in a notebook, you know, as like thing that I'm allowed to do while I figure out what my day is going to contain. Or like kind of compelling myself to write down a daily reflection without knowing what the content is going to be, or, you know, I mean, just like these like really small, doable, little things that add up to new habits, new ways of relating to your day, new ways of relating to the things that you have to do, you know, all this stuff. But one of the things that— I've completely forgotten where I started that sentence [Laughs] I'm like what is the thing that I've learned? Oh Lord. It's that kind of -

Hannah McGregor: [00:24:53](#) So relatable.

Gena Zuroski: [00:24:56](#) - [Laughs] Yes.

Hannah McGregor: [00:24:56](#) So it's, it's small practices.

Gena Zuroski: [00:24:59](#) Yeah. That, wasn't the point. That was -

Hannah McGregor: [00:25:01](#) About getting out from under capitalism.

Gena Zuroski: [00:25:03](#) It was about getting out from under capitalism.

Hannah McGregor: [00:25:06](#) What you were saying really reminds me of a conversation I've been having sort of iteratively over the past few months with friend of the podcast, Zena Sharman about the relationship between routine and ritual. And the idea of, of, you know, particularly in this moment, when for so many of us, our lives have become so much smaller, so much more boring, so much less eventful and more like, "Oh, I'm just in this space, waking up every day, doing the same thing over and over again.", And how might it be possible to rethink those routines as rituals that are, you know, deliberately and with care and intention structuring your day, structuring your work, structuring your life

and the way that ritual brings this intention and this joy and this celebration and this kind of agency into it. So rather than it being, and I am absolutely guilty of this, you know, I wake up in the morning, I look at what I have on my agenda and I just go like, "Ughhh."

Gena Zuroski: [00:26:13](#)

Yes.

Hannah McGregor: [00:26:14](#)

Ughhhhh. Like crushed by adulthood again.

Gena Zuroski: [00:26:20](#)

Exactly. Well, so this actually did remind me of what I was going to say a moment ago, which is that I've, I've come to understand how much being immersed in academia, you know, and, and immersed because I love it, I wouldn't be here if I, if I didn't love it, but when you're immersed in a career like this and a culture like, like academia and you feel in love with it and your work, your pleasures become so attached to even the most punishing aspects of the work and the culture. And so one of the things that I've really been using journaling and planning to, to reflect on and to think critically about are the, the things that make me feel good for good reasons. And the things that made me feel good for bad reasons.

Hannah McGregor: [00:27:19](#)

Ha-hah.

Gena Zuroski: [00:27:19](#)

And I'm not talking about like sex or anything, right. Like I'm talking about like professional rituals, right?

Hannah McGregor: [00:27:25](#)

Mm-hmm.

Gena Zuroski: [00:27:25](#)

Like, why do I feel like — I don't know one little example I'll give you is like a couple of years ago I wrote an article that was not really a research article. It was a very — I was like invited to, to write the state of the field article about, you know, one of my areas of expertise. So really low stakes, you know, wrote it out, didn't have a lot invested in it, you know, and then I got, and it was peer reviewed. So then I got the peer review reports and one of the reports was like, "this is a very competent essay". And I felt such a rush of relief and like pleasure from being called competent that like, I almost cried. And then I was like, what's going on here? Like what [Laughs], what has this place done to me that I am so in need of like a crumb of positive reinforcement that some stranger calling me competent at work — I know I'm competent.

Hannah McGregor: [00:28:32](#)

[Laughs] At my literal job that I'm definitely good at.

Gena Zuroski: [00:28:37](#) Like that's a bad form of pleasure, you know. Like that's a form of pleasure that, you know, I savored it for the moment, but I think it's worth recognizing that that comes from a place of deprivation, you know?

Hannah McGregor: [00:28:49](#) Mmm.

Gena Zuroski: [00:28:49](#) And like, so in our routines, like so many of the things that you get drawn to do, or that you're like addicted to, you know, like your work things that you're addicted to — the, the job encourages you to, to feed those compulsion's because it's good for the job somehow.

Hannah McGregor: [00:29:06](#) Mmm-hmm. Mmm-hmm.

Gena Zuroski: [00:29:06](#) But those are often the things where you get to the end of the day and you're like, "why did I spend my entire day, like answering emails?" You know? It's partially because, you know, someone tells you that's your job to sit at the desk and answer emails all day, but it's a compulsion that you've learned, you know, you've habituated yourself to. And it's one that it's worth breaking because it doesn't actually make you feel good. You just feel like you can't stop doing it.

Hannah McGregor: [00:29:34](#) Yeah.

Gena Zuroski: [00:29:34](#) So, yeah. So the planning and journaling is I think also a way of cultivating better rituals, like recognizing which rituals have been instilled in you and are like, kind of like automating you in ways that you are not enjoying and are not serving you or the people and things you actually want to serve. And, and then cultivating some other ones that you can be attached to in the same way.

Hannah McGregor: [00:30:02](#) Oh my God. I love that. I have been experiencing, you know, I think this is a, this is a thing that happens to a lot of academics is that when I get really busy, I get really into this head space of like tasks, like doing tasks. Everyday my job is to do tasks. I'm going to do a hundred tasks. At the end of the day, I'm going to finish all my tasks. And then I check them off. And then I did a good job. And then tomorrow more tasks.

Gena Zuroski: [00:30:29](#) [Laughs].

Hannah McGregor: [00:30:29](#) [Laughs] And if I find time to like write or think it always has to be framed as a, like achieve X, write a paragraph of this. It's a task. I checked it off. And when I, when it comes time to do

something like, read, like, you know, I just have to read this book and like, think about it, that kind of work doesn't fit well into tasks -

Gena Zuroski: [00:31:01](#)

Right.

Hannah McGregor: [00:31:01](#)

- you know, particularly the kind of reading or thinking that has to happen slowly and generatively. And that, you know, if I'm actually gonna come up with an idea, like a new idea to articulate, I have to like go sit down. And like, give myself some time and space. But I'm just like, "How do I fit? Where? That's not a task. How do I? I have email, how dare I? How dare I read?"

Gena Zuroski: [00:31:29](#)

[Laughs] Right. Yeah. "What did I —what's the yield of this reading? What did it yield?"

Hannah McGregor: [00:31:34](#)

Mmm-hmm.

Gena Zuroski: [00:31:34](#)

Like I, I don't know. I also think though that this is something that I was talking about with the graduate students in our department here at McMaster recently as part of the doctoral research methods course that I taught last year. And I was a guest speaker in this year's version. And we were talking about like dissertation planning, so project planning, and I was thinking about, you know, you have to learn, and it is something you have to learn right through practice. You have to learn that classic planning trick of taking the big project and then like breaking it down into manageable tasks. Right? Like otherwise, how would you ever get anything done? And I was trying to think about that model, not in terms of let's get addicted to tasks [Laughs] right -

Hannah McGregor: [00:32:23](#)

Uh-huh.

Gena Zuroski: [00:32:23](#)

- but actually to go back to your initial question, like more in terms of like an economy of hope, right? Like how do you use planning methods to turn your big project, which is a thing you hope for, right? Like that's something hope that you will do this big research project that will make a meaningful contribution to a scholarly conversation of some kind and you can't just wish it into being. You have to do it.

Hannah McGregor: [00:32:53](#)

Yep.

Gena Zuroski: [00:32:53](#)

So how do you do it? And one of the things I've always struggled with with big project planning is that you never feel like you're

making progress on it, if the, if you're always keeping the big thing in mind.

Hannah McGregor: [00:33:07](#)

Mmm.

Gena Zuroski: [00:33:07](#)

Because at the end of every day, the book isn't done. The dissertation isn't done. No matter what you did that day, right. Even if you wrote 3000 words, there's still like this part of you, that's focused on the big thing where you're like, "my book's not done!" It will never be done until the day that you've made it done.

New Speaker: [00:33:26](#)

Yep.

Gena Zuroski: [00:33:27](#)

And there are so many days with a big project, right? There's like days and days and days. There's weeks, months, years. So part of the, breaking it down into tasks for me, I think it's helpful to think of it in terms of giving me achievable things that I can identify on the page as a form of progress. Like if it's a word count that works for you, right. There's no virtue, there's no inherent virtue in having written a thousand words, right.

Hannah McGregor: [00:34:01](#)

[Laughs]. Tell writing Twitter that.

Gena Zuroski: [00:34:01](#)

Yeah you're a bad person, if you don't do it. There's no inherent virtue. But if you write it down and you say, "if I write a thousand words tomorrow, I have made this measurable progress toward my 50,000 word book."

Hannah McGregor: [00:34:17](#)

Yep.

Gena Zuroski: [00:34:18](#)

That's good. You know. That's helpful to you. That gives you something like positive to hold onto as you like fall asleep. [Laughs].

Hannah McGregor: [00:34:28](#)

[Laughs] I mean, I love that as a, sort of both as a way of thinking about the relationship between sort of hope and structure in completing a particular project, but also the relation between hope and structure in any of the kinds of work that we are trying to do that doesn't have an end period, right? Like a book has an end at some point, if it's only because you go like, "well, that's good, that's good enough I guess -

Gena Zuroski: [00:34:58](#)

Yeah.

Hannah McGregor: [00:34:58](#)

- Here." It's kind of an artificial end in the sense that you just say, "I guess I will stop working on it now." But, but so many of

these kinds of work that we are doing literally never ends, will literally never be done, will never be accomplished. And that sense of like, how do you stop that awareness that we will never accomplish the things that we are working towards? Not in a, I mean, not in a, like, we're all doomed to fail, but in the sense of like, there, there will never stop being injustice. There will never stop being —there will always be to do.

New Speaker: [00:35:37](#)

Totally.

New Speaker: [00:35:37](#)

So how do you, you know, make that work not a wish, but a hope, right? So that it is married to actual work, but in a way that propels and, and lets you have energy and intention around it, rather than the endlessness of it being the thing that, that stops you. Right? Like I think we've all, we've all had that moment. And I'm thinking particularly about EDI work. I've recently realized that in Canada we call it EDI, equity, diversity and inclusion, and in the States, they call it DEI, diversity, equity and inclusion. And I don't know why we have two different orders for it, but there you go. We do. But it means the same thing, which is it's the sort of institutionalized framework for addressing systemic barriers to access in various industries and institutions. And that is work that when you get drawn into it and start doing it, it just feels like one, so hopeless when you actually start to see the way these institutions work, it can feel so hopeless. And also so readily transformed into a series of meaningless tasks that don't actually move towards anything.

Gena Zuroski: [00:37:03](#)

Yes, that's right. That are not forms of, of progress. And —but are called progress. Like progress is another one of these words that has like, you know, vastly different meanings in the way that it's deployed. And so progress in the, in the sense of, you know, being able to feel like you are moving, that your actions are, are meaningful toward some future objective, right, is like one thing. But a lot of what gets called progressive in terms of practices that get taken up institutionally or, you know, are, are the opposite of that. They're things that happen instead of moving toward structural change. [Laughs]

Speaker 3: [00:37:52](#)

They're literally not progressive. So I, yeah. So as a, as a literature person, I find these kinds of institutional realities, perplexing.

Hannah McGregor: [00:38:02](#)

[Laughs].

Gena Zuroski: [00:38:02](#)

But there we are. But I actually, I think that like your comments about devoting ourselves to movements that will never be finished, right. Where there is no actual end goal. And, and how

do you do that? Like how do you participate in something and how do you stay, you know, with something, knowing that you're not going to know when it's done, because it will never be done. I've been thinking about that a lot in terms of collectivity, practices of collectivity in academia, but also, I think this is relevant to mentorship, you know, and, and collectivity and, and mentorship are two things that I actually have been thinking together a lot recently. Because part of it is — like at least speaking from my own experience, as someone who's very inclined to take on everything myself and, and like, just be like, "okay, look, I'm just going to do this". [Laughs] All these things need to be done.

- Hannah McGregor: [00:39:02](#) Ugh.
- Gena Zuroski: [00:39:02](#) I recognize I'm competent in them.
- Hannah McGregor: [00:39:03](#) Ugh.
- New Speaker: [00:39:03](#) I have no idea what I'm doing on the others, but I feel like I could give it a go. I don't want to inconvenience anyone. I don't want anyone else to feel like they have to do everything in the world. So look, I'll just do it.
- Hannah McGregor: [00:39:14](#) I am in this picture and I don't like it. Like just [Laughs] like please untag me. I don't -
- Gena Zuroski: [00:39:23](#) It's like a very dominant strain of my personality.
- Hannah McGregor: [00:39:23](#) [Laughs].
- Gena Zuroski: [00:39:26](#) And so like collectively is something I have to work at because I believe in it very strongly, but it doesn't come like naturally really to me. But the thing is that it's important to disentangle yourself from those, those modes of individuated responsibility and agency, right? Where if your way of being and of doing things and of devoting yourself to things is really formed in the shape of you as an individual person, you can't do it. It's impossible. Right? And that's when the realization that you're working towards something that you will never accomplish or that you will never finish, becomes a site of like hopes being crushed. [Laughs] Right? Whereas if you really learn to relate to others through that work in a mode of collectivity, you're never solely responsible for the achievements or the progress or whatever, right? So like that burden gets lifted off of you in a way that makes your life livable again, right.

- Gena Zuroski: [00:40:41](#) It gives you some space to breathe. And it also allows you to lend your energy, you know, productively to others, right? It's not just like someone else is there to like take some of the work away from you. It's like, oh, the work actually feels completely different when it's distributed among this, this, this collective of us. And for me, that has been really key to being able to think intergenerationally towards a future. And this is why it's related to mentorship for me. Because once you really learn to like think and act as an intellectual and as an, as an activist in a collective mode, then you recognize mentorship as a way of doing that toward a future that you're not gonna necessarily be around for, or be involved in. Right? Like the work, it's not like you're scared you're going to die before the work gets done. It's more like you get to hope that the work is going to continue because you see who it's going to be carried in.
- Hannah McGregor: [00:41:47](#) So that sense —yeah, absolutely. Mentorship is another future-oriented practice that really does have the sense of sort of a, like a deliberate practice of hope. You know, that we are, we are working forward into, into possibilities. I mean, I think about this all the time when I think about like my own relationship to this institution, which it is, it is tricky to be in a place like the university where so many people have really embraced the rhetoric of the institution and seem to wholeheartedly believe in it's good. It's tricky to be a person who's in it and also deeply suspicious of it. [Laughs]. And to be like, okay, I'm here. I don't really buy any of this stuff about the good we're doing. So why am I here again? Like, oh yeah. Because like a lot of other people are here. And if the only people who are here are the people who are like, "yeah, the university!" Then it's, then nothing's going to change.
- Hannah McGregor: [00:42:55](#) And that for me has, has always been about a, I mean, an orientation, particularly towards students. That's like, is there a way of making this into a space that is more livable for, for other people? That, that collectivity piece of it, it's even harder to wrap my head around what that would look like then to think about mentorship, which I think, you know, mentorship can still be isolated and individuated such that like, I mean, we see this a lot with like scholars gathering mentees as a form of institutional capital, that it is about boosting the reputation and status of a particular individual via the mentees that they can like point at and be like, "look at that person, mentored that person".
- Gena Zuroski: [00:43:42](#) Right. Yes.

- Hannah McGregor: [00:43:42](#) "Look what I did." But the whole notion of this sort of like collective model of transformation in which mentorship plays one role is such a, it's such a total, totally different way to imagine that.
- Gena Zuroski: [00:43:58](#) Yeah. Yeah. I think that, so the, the collectivity idea, the reason it's been on my mind a lot lately is because I've been invited to speak in the last few years about like the Bigger Six Collective, which I'm a founding member of and the other collectives that named themselves as collective, the V21 collective is one, you know, one of the first that kind of made a splash in its field of Victorian studies. But the ones that I've been more involved in are the collectives of BIPOC scholars in like pre-1900 fields of literary and cultural studies, which are overwhelmingly white fields for, for reasons, right, by design. And so the reason that these communities are pulling together in the form of the collective, I mean, there are multiple reasons, multiple ways you could explain it, but one of them is just, we've been, we've been isolated from one another, you know, like to be frank, like we're the token hires in, in these fields.
- Gena Zuroski: [00:45:08](#) And so they only hire one of us if, if any, right. [Laughs].
- Hannah McGregor: [00:45:12](#) Yep.
- Gena Zuroski: [00:45:12](#) And they —and institutions overwhelmingly hire non-Black and non-Indigenous people of colour in these fields and then feel like, "Oh, we hired, you know, a person of colour". And so that kind of isolation by, by institutional design has now yielded I think a few generations of BIPOC scholars in fields that have adopted like taken up, taken an interest in race and colonialism without structurally changing the white supremacy of the way they define knowledge and institutional authority. And the collective is like the way that we come together —I mean, social media has made it possible because collectives can form over geographical distance, you know? So, so hashtags on Twitter have become a way of collecting. And, and what we find is that, like, I don't know, it's, this is also a mentorship thing, right?
- Gena Zuroski: [00:46:17](#) Like there are senior scholars whose work was really, really crucial to my own education and my own formation as a scholar and intellectual and, and an activist, I think. And, and to feel collected with them is just, it's like, it's so thrilling, but then also, you know, we're collecting this, this next generation of emerging scholars so that they don't have to follow the same kind of path that we did through the institutional channels, right. Where, like, you know, you kind of, if you're lucky you get kind of like sucked into one of these pathways to professional

success at the expense of, of being in community with all the other scholars of colour. And, and, you know, like those channels don't exist anymore the same way that they did when, you know, when I at least was a junior scholar. So that's one thing like the collectives are taking the place of professional pathways that are actively being shut down. But I also think that it's just a, it's kind of a better way to be in professional relation with other people. And I'm happy that we're able to do it in ways that literally materially did not exist, you know, a generation ago when I was a graduate student.

Hannah McGregor: [00:47:49](#) It strikes me as you talk about collectives and these, these ways of, of bridging deliberately constructed forms of isolation and individuation, sort of working against that. It also strikes me that the model of collectivity really challenges the sort of unidirectional idea of mentorship. That it's a sort of, you know, the expert mentors, the inexpert, the established mentors, the non-established. That like when you are organized as a collective there's possibilities for mentorship moving in, in lots of different directions between people at lots of different stages.

Gena Zuroski: [00:48:30](#) Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. It's in the collectives where I find us moving away from the, the vocabulary of junior and senior scholars. You know, I mean, we don't have —I've even been thinking about, you know, the phrase emerging scholars, which I use just because I don't yet have a better word to, to, to name, you know, the, the, the group of people I'm trying to name there. And emergent is a little bit like more flexible, I think, than calling someone junior —It's just like less, you know, it's less patronizing than junior. But I think in, yeah, in the collective model, senior and junior, like cease to make sense, because knowledge is being exchanged laterally in, in so many different directions. And, and, you know, that's, that's a function of, of a space like Twitter too, where, yeah. I mean, there's, there's like too much to say about Twitter as like a site of anything [Laughs].

Hannah McGregor: [00:49:27](#) Phew!

Gena Zuroski: [00:49:28](#) But I will say that I, you know, I continue to find it a really vibrant space for that kind of messy perpetual learning. You know, I go on there because I'm like absorbing knowledge from people who I —like if I were in a university, like an actual university space with them, I would want to learn from them just as much. But the actual structure of the space, right, and the dynamics of the space would not put us in a place where they could talk to me that way. Right. And so I'm, and I could learn. Or, or allow me to like overhear them, talking to someone

else in a way that I am going to get a very powerful lesson from right by like listening in. Like at work, I wouldn't, and I shouldn't be able to listen in on that conversation [Laughs].

Hannah McGregor: [00:50:30](#) Yeah [Laughs].

Gena Zuroski: [00:50:30](#) But on Twitter you can. And so I think that overturning those, those hierarchies of experience is so important right now, because experience, I mean, this is what you're talking about before with the planning and, and journaling, like a lot of our professional experience has taught us bad things that we're now trying to unlearn, you know?

Hannah McGregor: [00:50:59](#) Yeah.

Gena Zuroski: [00:50:59](#) And, and we have a lot to learn from the people who haven't been conditioned that way. Yet. [Laughs].

Hannah McGregor: [00:51:07](#) One hundred percent. I feel this all the time with my, my graduate students and my undergraduates that they come into the institution with a radical sense of hope and a radical sense of resistance to the expectations of, you know, civility and professionalism that, that are attached to, to the university. And that gets, you know, the, the general model of professionalization and mentorship is that that kind of radical hope gets professionalized out of you. So that you're not going to be the kind of person who like speaks up out of turn anymore, because you have learned the structures and the systems and the hierarchies. And that kind of unlearning doesn't work in the same sort of top down generational way. Right? Like that is something that I am learning from my students all the time. I mean, in general, I'm learning SFU in particular seems to be an institution that really draws a fairly politically radical student body. And so I'm always like in the classroom being like, here's an idea and my students are like "take it 17 steps further, please. Thanks for coming out. You know, TikTok is significantly more radical on this topic. So if you could just catch up."

Gena Zuroski: [00:52:24](#) You've got some homework, prof. [Laughs].

Hannah McGregor: [00:52:28](#) [Laughs]. Yeah. Very much. And I also think, you know, we were, we were talking a little bit before I hit record about, about podcasting and this kind of sense of like, you know, new media creation and what it means to be somebody who can like figure out how to use a particular skillset and get your voice out there. And that is something that, you know, we, we've got a handful of senior scholars in the field of, of podcasting studies, but it's,

it's a very new field. And as a skillset, a lot of the people who are great at it are very young. You know, I have a research assistant right now, Stacey Copeland, who I have hired to work with me on every project that I have, because she is like so much better audio production than I am. [Laughs]. When I think about like, who needs my mentorship around podcasting.

Hannah McGregor: [00:53:21](#)

It is often scholars who are more senior than me, but who are, you know, have an appetite for, for this skillset and for doing this kind of work, but don't necessarily have the comfort or the familiarity with the medium. You know, I don't want to, I feel even as I am articulating this, this sort of like sliding towards the discourse of the digital native, which is nonsense, like that's just not how media literacy or skillsets work. But it is, you know, one example of the way that, that when we expand our sense of the kinds of ways in which we want to become skillful, the assumption that it moves from senior to junior, late career to early career really gets dismantled. Right. Because there are, there are many kinds of skills that are not necessarily associated with, with seniority, I guess.

Gena Zuroski: [00:54:15](#)

Oh, absolutely. And like, I don't know if I should tell this story on like a public podcast, but I'm not going to name names so I think it's okay. But like one of my most treasured memories of, of an academic conference was, I was at, you know, one of the major meetings of people in my field. And there was a panel of, it was all senior male scholars, very well-known, you know, the fathers of the field gathered to talk about cutting edge online platforms for the kind of, of work that we do. And, you know, it's like, I don't want to be mean because like, these are things that can happen to anyone. We've all been at conferences. We know how technology works, you know, in a conference room, but like, it really was like, one of them couldn't get his computer to connect to the projector so that he could give his paper on like using technology to disseminate knowledge.

Gena Zuroski: [00:55:20](#)

And then another one, like, you know, was connected to the web and was trying to find something he wanted to show us, but like, couldn't find it on the internet. And so resorted to one of those, like pads of paper on a lecture board-

Hannah McGregor: [00:55:38](#)

[Laughs].

Gena Zuroski: [00:55:38](#)

- to draw a picture of the thing he wanted to show us on the internet. And I was like, this is — like, for me, it was hilarious, but it was also terrifying because I was like, what's, what am I going to do that it will be the equivalent of this for my students one day? You know, or like my colleagues. Like this is the vision

of what seniority looks like in our profession [Laughs]. And I don't want to be that. So.

Hannah McGregor: [00:56:13](#)

I, I definitely feel like there is a, a curse whereby as soon as you are somebody who is talking about technology immediately all of the technology breaks. And I also feel I've really, I've really noticed this when I had a friend of the podcast, Brenna Clarke Gray come to my class to teach my students about making GIFs and memes. And, you know, she was like unfamiliar university, unfamiliar technology setup, unfamiliar notes, like things not necessarily working right away, a website that's supposed to load that's not necessarily loading, like, you know, technological problems emerged and watching the way that she handled them as somebody whose job is like, she has an educational technology specialist and a component of her job is like helping faculty solve the technology problems that they encounter. And I was like, oh, the difference is you actually know how this works because you have had to build things and fix things and solve other people's problems. Whereas, so often people who are like, "Tech is cool and great. A series of RAs built this for me. I have absolutely no idea the labor that went into it, but I'm the face of it because I am senior and established, but if something goes wrong, I'm going to have no idea how to fix it. Cause I didn't make it."

Gena Zuroski: [00:57:41](#)

Exactly. This is another example of, of like empty, meaningless hope, right? That enthusiasm for our technological future that is completely divorced from any actual knowledge of like the labor invested in the object, the mechanisms that make it work, the ideological conditions in which the thing came to be and, and continues to operate, right? Like if you don't have at least a working understanding of those parts of the technology, you don't get to hope for the future organized around that piece of tech. You haven't earned it.

Hannah McGregor: [00:58:29](#)

[Laughs]. I mean the flip side of that is the people who literally built the thing knowing that it was terrible. And they're like, I keep thinking about that, that Netflix documentary, The Social ...Something. It's called The Social Something. Who knows. But the whole thing is just like a bunch of white dudes who are like major engineers for technology companies who are like, "we made it bad on purpose. We knew, we knew that it was going to ruin your lives. So you should trust us when we say it's very bad and you should stop using all of these websites right away. We know it's bad. We made it."

Gena Zuroski: [00:59:06](#)

"We made it. It's evil. We made it evil on purpose."

New Speaker: [00:59:09](#) Yeah yeah yeah. "We have a lot of money now and we're not giving any of it back. But we will do this documentary where we tell you, 'get off Facebook'. Anyway, I'm going to hop on my yacht now."

Gena Zuroski: [00:59:20](#) Goodness. Oh man. Yeah. Yeah.

Hannah McGregor: [00:59:24](#) [Laughs].

Gena Zuroski: [00:59:24](#) It's all bad. It's so bad, Hannah.

Hannah McGregor: [00:59:27](#) [Laughs].

Speaker 4: [00:59:30](#) Okay. I would like to end by asking you about a really beautiful exercise that you have created that I think like many other people I have, I have used with my own students that I think ties into all of these conversations that we have been having about, about mentorship, about collectivity, about reframing our relationship to this institution and to the work that we do in the way that we do it. And that is the, Where Do You Know From? Exercise. Can you tell us a little bit about Where Do You Know From,? and, and where that came from?

Gena Zuroski: [01:00:08](#) Yeah, yeah. I can. And I'm really, I'm really glad for the opportunity to talk about it because I've been feeling very self-conscious since it's been taken up and it's circulated widely and I'm so grateful that it has. And I, you know, I really love that people are finding it useful. But I've, I've become, self-conscious about my name being attached to it, right? Like I don't want to reap a certain kind of professional credit from it because it's actually designed to like, not do that [Laughs] or to like disrupt the systems in which that credit is worth something. So it's important for me to kind of tell the story of where that exercise comes from. Which is, I think it was in 2018. My relationship to time is like wobbly at best. So, it might've been another year. But I think it was 2018 Boise hosted this one day symposium on mentoring Indigenous graduate students that I attended with a colleague of mine here at McMaster, Daniel Coleman. And the day —I mean, you know, back to mentorship, like that day was really transformative for me in a number of ways.

Gena Zuroski: [01:01:24](#) It was, it was designed as an act of mentorship for non-Indigenous scholars who are responsible for mentoring students and hopefully for mentoring Indigenous graduate students. But in order to run a workshop or a symposium like that, like such care had to be taken to structure it in a way that was safe for the people participating. And Eve Tuck was one of the

organizers. And so that was the first time that I'd ever been in a room with Eve Tuck. I was a huge fan of her work, but watching her, you know, organize that event, that was like an example of mentorship in action that just struck very deeply with me. And, you know, she did things like reminding the people in the audience not to approach the day wondering what we were going to get from the speakers, but to sit and actually take a few minutes to think about what we had brought to this symposium and what were we going to give to the people on the stage who were, you know, generously giving their time and their labor and their expertise to us.

Gena Zuroski:

[01:02:41](#)

And the panelists were, you know, a lot of Indigenous scholars, including students and then some other, you know, scholars of colour speaking. So it was an extraordinary day. And at the end of it, you've asked everybody who had attended to think very deliberately about how we were going to carry forward, whatever it was we had learned from from the day. And one of the broad topics that was talked about a lot was the problem of— I mean, I'm not sure if anyone called it this at the time, I don't remember, but the problem of epistemicide in the, in the Western Academy. And, and the real violence that Indigenous people experience when they walk into spaces where their knowledge is not recognized as knowledge and where the expectation, the way their education is going to be measured and their progress in a program is going to be measured is the extent to which you display capability in thinking in an epistemological, like structure and language that historically is attached to genocide, you know, like the elimination of your way of knowing and of your way of being and of living.

Gena Zuroski:

[01:04:11](#)

And so, the Where Do You Know From? Exercise for me came from my attempt to think about how I could open a seminar class. So for me, it was absolutely about graduate seminars. Although I love that people have kind of adapted it for other pedagogical, you know, situations. But for me, I was like in a graduate seminar, you know, for years and years and years, I've done the thing where you go around the table and you say, you know, introduce yourself to the group. You know, where are you from? What do you study? Where did you get your BA? You know, like whatever it is.

Hannah McGregor:

[01:04:47](#)

Yep.

Gena Zuroski:

[01:04:47](#)

In one of the panels Minelle Mahtani actually talked about how she had learned from Katherine McKittrick about the way that, that seeming — that small talk question, "where are you from?" lands differently, especially in academic spaces, on people who

have arrived at that seminar table, from, you know, non-traditional pathways. Or on people, you know, this is something that I, you know, that I should know as a, you know, an Asian person of, of mixed descent who's been asked where are you from my whole life? And it's a, it's a racially charged question. Right.

Hannah McGregor: [01:05:23](#)

Yep.

Gena Zuroski: [01:05:23](#)

So Minelle said that she had learned from Katherine McKittrick to ask the question, "where do you know from?" instead. So that's like a literal quote from Katherine. And I wanted to sit with the question to think to myself, okay, how is that different when you ask someone "where do you know from?" How is that different from asking, "where are you from?" What kinds of answers is it kind of like encouraging? What are the possibilities put forward by that question that are, you know, not put forward or even foreclosed by the other question. And it was just my brainstorming around those questions that the material of the exercise came out of. And my goal was really not to make an elaborate, like identity exercise, you know. I think it's, I, it's important for me to say that. It's not about diversity and it's not about like getting people to like put the fullness of their diversity on the table so we can all like celebrate how, how, — what a good job the institution has done of like, including us all here.

Hannah McGregor: [01:06:30](#)

Like a discursive version of the potluck, where everybody brings a dish representing where they're from. Yeah.

Gena Zuroski: [01:06:38](#)

Yeah. It's not like — I don't want it to operate that way. I wanted it to be an opportunity for us to recognize as a collective in the class that the people here — you as the students have not arrived as, as blank slates, right? Like I'm an 18th centurist. I wrote about John Locke in my first book. I know how harmful the myth of like the blank slate is right. It's it, you know, and, and how it gets applied to land. Right. And hence colonialism. And so, like, I want the students to know, I don't see them as empty vessels or blank slates that are going to be filled with whatever it is I'm channeling on behalf of the institution, into them. I want them to know, I recognize them. And I want them to recognize each other as intellectual agents who are bringing a very particular kind of knowledge that they have gathered one way or another, that they are already exercising, to the table. And for us to recognize the knowledge in each person, but then the end of the exercise, like the conversation is about how do we recognize what we've gathered here, right.

Gena Zuroski: [01:07:55](#) It's a little bit like a potluck, right? It's like -

Hannah McGregor: [01:07:56](#) [Laughs].

Gena Zuroski: [01:07:56](#) - this is the bounty of knowledge that we have to work with in this course over the semester, you know, and only then do I introduce the syllabus. So it's like, I want us to gather our collective knowledge and think about it and recognize it, you know, take the time to do that before I then say, here's what we're going to, you know, here's what I'm adding to the mix and, and gonna ask us to do. And I'm sure there are ways it can go horribly wrong, but I haven't encountered those yet. And I'm really grateful. Like every time I've done this, it's really, it's been very, very different and we've —the conversation has gone different ways, but it has always kind of set that tone of everyone's knowledge is, is recognized here. And if I don't quite understand it, that's okay, but I, but I recognize that it exists and I'm going to respect it. Right. I'm going to interact with you in a way that is respectful. And I'm going to let you determine the terms of that.

Hannah McGregor: [01:09:01](#) Yeah. I love that, that framing of like, let us treat this space in this time as a collective. And the, one of the first things we need to do is not be like, "what are we going to get out of this?" It's what, what are we all bringing into it? What is the nature of this collective? What is the nature of the community we are gathering in the space, and then we can figure out what we can do.

Gena Zuroski: [01:09:25](#) Right.

Hannah McGregor: [01:09:25](#) Like we're always grappling with this relationship between sort of structure and freedom, I think when we design courses. But that idea of starting from the nature of the collective that we bring together in a classroom, and then seeing what is possible to sort of build out of that is so exciting. It's so much more exciting than to be like, well, "enjoy a death march through my predetermined pedagogy, everybody."

Gena Zuroski: [01:09:51](#) Right! Like, that's not fun.

Hannah McGregor: [01:09:54](#) It's really not. [Laughs]. And, you know, sometimes I think many of us have encountered those moments when we're like, "have some freedom" and people are like, "no, thank you. I would actually just like a clear set of instruction so that I can get this done and move on."

Gena Zuroski: [01:10:08](#) Exactly.

Hannah McGregor: [01:10:08](#) Which is, I think also fair in its own way. Not everybody's looking to have a transformative experience in every class. Sometimes they just need a credit.

Gena Zuroski: [01:10:17](#) Despotically fair.

Hannah McGregor: [01:10:20](#) [Laughs]. But it's exciting when you can, I'm teaching this the small cohort full time podcasting course next semester, that is, you know, the whole idea is that it is, it is student led. That you sort of, you know, build some basic structure for the course, but then the students actually just get to decide what shape the course is going to take and the kinds of rhythms of the week and the kinds of work that they're going to do. And this thinking that, that you have been, you know, sharing and helping to circulate, because I do think everything I've read about this exercise, I think that you always really thoroughly cite and situate the exercise in terms of, of where it came from for you. It has really been helping me think about what it might look like to create, you know, a container in which that work can happen, that, that the students can bring themselves into. Particularly in this weird environment where we are trying to create spaces and collectives without actually being able to sit down in a room together.

Gena Zuroski: [01:11:25](#) I know. You know, there are possibilities, obviously, you know, the fact that we can sit in this virtual space together from opposite sides of the continent is, you know, something I'm grateful for. But I miss sitting at that actual table so much.

Hannah McGregor: [01:11:39](#) Yep.

Gena Zuroski: [01:11:39](#) You know, it's, it's, it's mind boggling to me how long it's been since I sat at a table with people.

Hannah McGregor: [01:11:48](#) Yeah.

Gena Zuroski: [01:11:48](#) And I think that once we are able to do that again, I mean, this is a, this is an important and, and a good time to reflect on what gathering at the table is and what it means. And also what it can mean. Right? Like I think that, like, we're gonna recognize it as a site of hope in a way that maybe we didn't back when it was just like routine, right. [Laughs]. When it was just daily routine. And I think that that's, I think that's good because I think that we can make perhaps better use of our time together at tables than we've been doing so far.

Hannah McGregor: [01:12:23](#) Yeah. Oh, I can't wait until we can sit at a table together again,

Gena Zuroski: [01:12:28](#) Me too! [Laughs]. [Gena's Theme Song: "Head Over Heels" by The Go-Go's].

Hannah McGregor: [01:12:41](#) You want to learn more about Gena's work you can find her at Zuroski that's Z U R O S K I.wordpress.com. I've also included a link to her mixed cloud in the show notes, which she says has all her mix tapes. I don't even know what it means. I'm going to find out after this. As always, you can find 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 podcasts using the hashtag #secretfeministagenda. You can always rate and review the show. A final thank you to lapine403 for their, and I quote "posthumous review". 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. Gena's theme song was "Head Over Heels" by the Go-Go's. This episode was recorded on the traditional and unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations where I'm grateful to live and work. This has been Secret Feminist Agenda. Pass it on. [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]