**Leeds Decolonising Conversation with Femi Owolade and Estelle Uba**

*Excerpt:* *I think the key words for me when I think of decolonisation are unlearning and relearning, and I think when you put it like that, it becomes less about White versus Black or White versus Migrants. Decolonisation is not really about division. It is really about acknowledging the continual impact of colonialism, which we all live under. We all have a duty or moral obligation to undo certain ways of thinking, colonial ways of thinking. And I think when you put it like that, I think it can be a lot easier to digest. People won’t be so defensive about it.*

**Femi:** Hello, my name is Femi Owolade, and today I will be speaking to Estelle Uba about her work in journalism and how her online magazine has approached decolonisation. Estelle is a final year Sociology and English student at the University of Leeds and the founder of an online magazine called Gen Z talks. Welcome Estelle.

**Estelle:** Thank you for having me Femi.

**Femi:** Okay, so before we go into our conversation, I would like you to just give a very brief intro about yourself. How you became interested in decolonisation and what you do at the University of Leeds.

**Estelle:** So, I am a Final year English and Sociology BA student at University of Leeds and I'm also a student journalist, writer and editor. As you mentioned, I am the founder of an online magazine called Gen Z talks and the reason I got into decolonial work was because I'm really passionate about race and I'm passionate about the effects of colonialism on Migrants particularly like the black diaspora. It's just something that has always spoken to me since I was young, but I would say in terms of decolonisation specifically, I think my interest in that really grew from my sociology studies in first year when I learned that all the countries in Africa apart from Ethiopia had been colonised. When I learnt that, I remember, sitting in the lecture room that day and being so shocked. I mean, I knew that like, you know, colonisation was, you know, a really big thing in Africa, but I didn't know it was every single country! So, I think that really made me want to do a lot more research into colonisation and the impact it had on Africans till date and the impact it continues to have on us, and that's where my interest in decolonisation generally stems from.

**Femi:** Okay, well thank you very much. You know, being a PhD holder in history myself, in colonial history that is, I am fully aware of the trauma associated with the colonial experience, especially for Africans. You know you just alluded to the fact that all African countries were colonised, apart from Ethiopia, and being a Nigerian myself, and I know you are also Nigerian, that knowledge alone can do some psychological damage to us Africans. Okay, so now that you’ve spoken a bit about what sparked your interest in decolonisation, I will now like to know how that interest itself, led to the decision to start your online magazine called with Gen Z talks.

**Estelle:** What led me to start Gen Z talks was... I think it was the death of George Floyd. Actually, I remember being really traumatized by it and feeling like I really wanted to get my voice heard on the issue of race, not just with African Americans. But anti-black racism all over the world. Global anti-blackness and I remember writing a blog post about it and yeah, it was you know my friends and my family appreciated it but for me it wasn't enough, and I just felt like I needed to do more. I really wanted to give young people a platform to also vocalise their thoughts on these kinds of issues, on current affairs, social issues, politics, and all of these things going on in society. I think that's when the idea of Gen Z talks came to me. So yeah, I really just reached out to my closest friends, and they all agreed to hop on board. And yeah, we just from there decided to create a platform where young people can write about things that matter to them. Things that are important and you know kind of take back control of the narrative that we see in mainstream media and make it our own because, as you know, mainstream media is obviously controlled by the older generation, because that's who has the power and the money. Whereas students, you know we don't have the same privilege to voice our opinions on these things when our opinion is just as valid, if not more valid, since we grew up in a generation that's more open minded and we're more open. I just felt like it was really important to give fellow young people like me that platform as well. So yeah, that's how Gen Z came about, and we've used the platform so far to talk about so many different issues. We've spoken about the the experience of Black Arabs, for example, and how there's not enough emphasis on that. We've spoken about the new race report that came out (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities: The Report. Headed by Tony Sewell), from our perspective, from the perspective of young people, we spoke about how inaccurate it was. So yeah, there's so many issues we've covered already. And yeah, we look forward to covering more of these current affairs.

**Femi:** Thanks for that. So, you spoke a bit about the Mainstream media, and its portrayal of social issues and how the Gen Z don’t always get their opinion on these issues across. I would like to know what you think about the mainstream media itself, in relation to issues on colonialism. Do you think the mainstream media is a representation of colonial legacies? And do you think there is a sort of marginalisation of the voices and the opinions of underrepresented groups in the mainstream media.

**Estelle:** Yes, yes definitely. I definitely think the mainstream media reproduces, whether consciously or unconsciously, colonial ideologies, and like you said, sideline the voices of people of colour and those who are, you know, less represented in society. You know, at the end of the day, most journalists in the UK. I believe the figure is, I think the number of black journalists is only 0.2%, that alone, you know is very striking and I think just kind of speaks to the fact that it's predominantly white men in the media industry and they're the ones who are controlling the narrative and controlling what we learn about. And I think there has in recent years been the emergence of, you know more liberal kind of forms of media. I know the BBC tries to do its bit here and there, but I don't think it's enough. I think mainstream media is still largely, you know, white male dominated, and I think it means that we don't get to hear the perspectives of people of colour, and women of colour, disabled people, queer people. I think that's why it's important to have as many diverse perspectives and platforms, like Gen Z talks.

**Femi:** Thanks. I definitely think there's more to be done to make the mainstream media more inclusive. I think this is a very good place to transition into the next topic. The issue of decolonisation is contested in the mainstream media and generally in public discourse. Well, let’s just say it’s not, you know, very popular, especially in Britain. There seems to be a lot of resistance to the idea of decolonisation, to the idea of decolonising the curriculum. So, as a Gen Z student, what is your personal opinion on the idea of decolonisation, of decolonising the curriculum. Do you think this is essential?

**Estelle:** I think it's needed and it's very, very important. I think if people continue to see colonisation as just a physical process, I think that's where this idea that we don't need to decolonise anything comes from because for a lot of white British people, they think, well, you know you're not colonised anymore, so what's the issue? Can't we just all move on and it's just that ignorance of, you know, wanting to let the past be the past and let bygones be bygones without understanding the impact of colonisation, understanding that we need to unlearn. You know, people who are descendants of colonised people, and descendants of the colonists, we have a lot of unlearning to do. All of us, we have a lot of unlearning to do. There is a lot of colonial antiblack myths that is still being taught to us. A lot of anti-Asian myths as well. We have a lot of unlearning to do. These myths have shaped who we are and how we view ourselves. Unknowingly, we're biased towards Eurocentric ways of thinking. Eurocentric ways of looking. This is something I actually spoke about in this year’s undergraduate research festival at the University of Leeds. How much self-hatred can be taught and anti-blackness can be internalised and can be taught to black Africans. How we grow up to look up to the culture that’s been taught to us by our ‘colonial masters’. So yeah, I think decolonisation is very important.

**Femi:** Yes, thank you, thank you very much for that, so you know before we go to the very very last question, I would like you to just give a few illustrations of how Gen Z talks, as an online magazine, has practically addressed the issue of decolonization. How the online magazine informs its readers on, practical ways and things that they can Incorporate into their lifestyle to tackle the legacies of colonialism

**Estelle:** Gen Z talks is mostly about giving young people a voice, but not only just that, it is also about unlearning ways of thinking, and biases, you know, like unconscious racism. For example, we've produced many articles, dealing with the issue of racism, dealing with the issue of black identity. I personally wrote an article in the magazine, which was about Sarah Everard’s death, highlighting the issue of misogyny in our society. We also write about the murder cases of women of colour, which had previously been swept under the carpet by mainstream media. We published an article which discussed the Afro Latino identity and how you know more Africans need to be more aware of the experiences of Afro Latinos.

**Femi:** Interesting… Well, colonisation itself or decolonisation is such a complex issue, and I think the language people use to engage the public on decolonisation, is sometimes not simple you know. Well, this is really my personal opinion. As someone who has done decolonising work, I find that it is sometimes the case that people who engage in this work use ineffective language, we sometimes struggle to give a simple definition of decolonisation and fail to articulate the aims of decolonisation. We have to understand that people come from different walks of life and have varied perspectives on social issues. People have different perspectives. So, do you have thoughts on realistic and practical ways in which the mainstream media could be decolonised. And I know this question is quite complicated, and of course if you don't have the answer to it, that’s fine. But I would like to know what you think, for example, what sort of language do you think could be used to decolonise the mainstream media?

**Estelle**: I think decolonisation is viewed by the general public as a threat. I mean the general British public still cherish the British Empire or what they believe the empire stood for. Like I said earlier**,** I think the key words for me when I think of decolonisation are unlearning and relearning, and I think when you put it like that, it becomes less about White versus Black or White versus Migrants. Decolonisation is not really about division. It is really about acknowledging the continual impact of colonialism, which we all live under. We all have a duty or moral obligation to undo certain ways of thinking, colonial ways of thinking. And I think when you put it like that, I think it can be a lot easier to digest. People won’t be so defensive about it.But then again, that's if they are even willing to hear that.But you know, that's a different story because I know a lot ofpeople aren't willing to hear that. But yeah, I think for me personally,it's just really about being willing to unlearn and torelearn certain ways of thinking.

**Femi:** Wow, I think you’ve done a very, very good job, fantastic job, of simplifying ways of approaching decolonisation. Those two simple terms unlearning and relearning are so powerful and important, and I think that’s what we are trying to do at the University of Leeds with the decolonising working group, and I think this will lead very nicely to the next question, well the final question, which is, what do you think the University of Leeds can do to support student engagement with decolonisation?

**Estelle:** I think the main thing would be funding. Because you know if you really want to do anything in the world we live in, you need money. You need money to get things done, especially when it comes to students. Students are really busy people, and we don't have much money. So, when it comes to, for example, if you want to organise a conference that you know the ACS (Afro-Caribbean Society) can host, for example, you need to provide students with money so they can, you know, invest their time into doing this and organising the event. So yeah, I would say funding. And even thinking about Gen Z talks, you know since we started the online magazine, we have been running it just by ourselves and we had to rely on the passion and the goodwill or our writers and our contributors and illustrators. At the end of the day, people will eventually need to be incentivized with money to write for us, and only then will we grow to the level that we want to. And that's just with any other societies in the university. So I was an active member of the Black Feminist Society. We did some useful events. We had like venting sessions. But all of those were really low-cost events. These events just kind of required us to show up, and we didn't require much money, much funding. But I think it would have been nice to have seen us reach a wider scope of people with more funding. You know, hosting a really big conference where, you know, at least 100 people are invited and we can bring a panel of academics, and really influential people in the black community to talk to us and to inspire us. So yeah, I think that's really the key thing. Funding. I think that's what the university could do.

**Femi:** Thank you once again. Thanks for joining me and speaking about your work in journalism and how your online magazine has approached decolonisation. I’ve really enjoyed talking to you. I think what stands out the most are those two terms you recommend in thinking about decolonisation, unlearning and relearning. That’s very thoughtful. Well, thanks again for joining me and I wish you all the best in your studies, I know you're in your final year now and finishing up your degree. I wish you the best in that, and of course in Gen Z talks too. Thanks Estelle.

**Estelle:** Thank you, thank you for having me.