

Introduction

Nina Davies

You're listening to Future Artefacts FM , a bi-monthly podcast/broadcast featuring speculative fiction audio works by artists and writers produced and presented by Nina Davies,

Rebecca Edwards

Rebecca Edwards

Niamh Schmidtke

and Niamh Schmidtke, on RTM

ND

and also available on podcast channels.

NS

The programme focuses on fictional works intended for broadcast to carve out a better understanding of the now by exploring various interpretations of the future.

RE

Together with guests we discuss the mechanics of different types of storytelling to reveal the complexities of contemporary culture. Let's get started.

All

Let's get started.

Artist Introduction

ND

Welcome back to future artefacts FM. This is episode 29 which is a part two to Episode 28 with guest Suley

Suley
hello.

ND
How are you?

S
Still well!

ND
We're actually recording this on the same day. So, yeah. So first thing I just want to say is probably, if you haven't listened to Episode 28 it might be a good idea to listen to the previous episode, just so that you're caught up.

And if you don't really have time to listen to episode 28 maybe just at least listen to the first 20 minutes so you can hear part one to Suley's work,

NS
Yeah, we'll be referencing some of the topics that we picked up in the previous episode and expanding on them more. For anyone who hasn't had a chance to listen to episode 28 and wants to come in cold, we'll briefly introduce Suley:

Playwright, painter, lawyer and lecturer, Suley uses world building as a radical tool to deliberately instigate change. His latest body of work is an attempt to critically reflect on the familiar with which we are inextricably bound, fusing sculpture, ceramics, print, media, film and sound, Suley continues the Afro Futurist tradition of generating a multiplicity of futures with which to positively affect the present.

ND
Yeah, and I don't know whether I've actually introduced the work, but this is your first act in your larger body of work called *Black Holes*. And on the previous episode, we listened to the first part of Act One, and in this episode we're listening to the second part of Act One.

NS

Is there any way you want people who have listened to the previous episode to now approach the second half or..

S

Yeah, I think the same. Just, you know, with an open mind, good quality, quality output. I'm excited for the second part to be shown.

ND

Okay, great. Well, we'll just jump straight on in. The second part of this is around 20 ish minutes, and we'll see you on the other side.

NS

Right bye. See you soon.

Work: Black Holes Act One (Scene Two)

[music]

You alright bredren? How you doin?

I'm packing boxes...

What about that barber shop across the road...

What barber shop across the road?

I aint seen you for a minute man. Anyway, what you getting done today?

Just a little bit off the top.

Yeah. New Year, same stuff.

Yeah, if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

I hear you. What's been going on with you, sir?

Just keepin' my eyes off the news.

What you sayin'?

Dooky stuff, man. Creepy dooky stuff man.

Like what?

Aliens, bro!

What aliens?

Bare aliens man, they crash landed. There's a box in the parking lot. Brother. Listen, I'm telling you, it's all a myth. It's all some deep fake nonsense made up by the government that's used to get rid of us. But how come my man sounds like that old dude? It makes no sense. No sense. It's like a hoax. Man, don't believe it.

I don't know. Man, it's on Reddit on Twitter. It's everywhere, bro, like everyone's talking about this thing

So you're telling me that in this whole galaxy, bro, aliens, bro, like ET himself, just beams down to Earth. Some people say that they're already here, but let's just think about it, like if they just beam down to earth, and I know where they end up, in South bloody London.

Three plantains for one pound. Why not, bro?

Where you getting two plantains for one pound from?

Peckham, bro. There's still places, bro.

I aint seen that since pre-covid man. Of all things in this mighty galaxy to chat about, you know, I mean bloody stars exploding, black holes, dark matter. You see what I mean? I see things on the news about heat death or the freaking universe. Serious things are going up there, man, serious things. And they want to chat about us. They want us. It's nonsense. Bro. Like, pure breeze, bruv. Like, I can't believe that people like yourself and yourself and you over there are actually buying it.

What if we're the chosen people?

Really?!

I mean, read up the Genesis page 12.

Here we go.

"My lord said to Abraham, go from your country, from your father house, to the land, and I will show you, and I'll make of you a great nation."

Yeah, yeah. I hear you. Preacher man, I hear you, Preacher Man, I hear you. Preacher Man, I ain't even gonna argue with that, yeah, but respect for me. Look, I don't know the Bible like that, but I know that the Bible don't relate here, like, this. Listen, we're talking about aliens. Like, if *they* are real and *they* needed us, then *they* will just take us. Man, you know, I mean, just beam me up. In fact, just take us, I wont pay rent for the rest of the year, man.

Nah. Man, but think about it. But why would they travel *quay* far in some box just to chill with a British mandem, like politicians and that.

This whole thing feels like bad news. Man, even if it's a joke, enough people are buying it. Like my nephew, he shook now, like, what is my sister supposed to say? The aliens are fake, but people want to believe that

they'll take us away. Or the aliens are real and might actually take us away?

Listen, all I'm saying is that's mad. Your shape-ups done. This conversation is nuts.

Oi, is that the travel news? Put it up!

[music]

[travel news anchor]

"Do expect delays around Parliament Square, Trafalgar Square and Buckingham Palace. At the moment, for the second day straight, there are demonstrations. So road closures are in place, including along Whitehall birdcage walk and the mile. The M4 westbound from Chiswick roundabout is suspended at the A 205 southbound from Chiswick and westbound from Putney is closed. Also closed is the A 316 between Chiswick bridge and Twickenham bridge. The A 307 along Kew road is suspended, massive delays throughout Brentford, Richmond, Chiswick and Acton due to the army blockages and curfew. I'm Mike Miggins, your next update is in 20 minutes here on radio news."

[music]

[news anchor]

"It's 3:40, this is Andrew Meeks, and one of our main stories today is the offer that we, the British people, have received from the supposed extraterrestrial material in Kew Gardens.

I'm assuming you've seen the footage, but just in case, I'll say it again. Aliens have visited Earth, the UK, to be exact - they never get tired of saying that - and have offered us gold technology, nuclear fusion, the ability to make a sun - imagine that! - in exchange for our nation's black citizens. Now we're going to go straight to the phone. Since we've been inundated today with so many messages and calls, we won't have much time to talk, given the backlog of callers. In all my years of broadcasting, I've never

seen anything like this. Who said radio was dead, eh? Right. It's incredible. Call her on line one. We have got Mike from Southport. Hello, Mike. Hey, I'm just gonna jump straight in, like,

Please.

And I want to start by saying that I'm not racist. I just love me country, like, and I'm hearing a lot of people black people, seeing a lot of negative things about the situation we find ourselves in, or saying that this doesn't fair, but we don't know the intentions of these beings, but I just wish we/they would be less superstitious. I mean, let's look at this with some perspective. All right, we, Great Britain, have been chosen as the landing site for our world's first contact with bloody aliens. I just think black people aren't seeing the bigger picture here, and just frankly, they're reverting to base fears and foolishness.

Okay, thank you, Mike. There's a lot to reflect on there. Right next up, we have Jane from Suffolk. Jane, hi.

Hi Andrew.

Hello, Jane.

Long time listener, first time caller, sorry, but I'm a bit nervous. Well, I think we should be leading with empathy and reject. This awful trade outright. Okay, I'm an English woman. I'm married to a beautiful black man. We've got two kids together. Your last caller would rip my family apart for cash and shiny machines. I just can't believe what I'm hearing. I mean, Andrew, I can't I mean, how is this all even going to work? It's just awful. It's just, I'm sorry. [cries]

Thank you. Thank you for your bravery, Jane. You know you raise a good question about the logistics of it. All right, next up on line three, we have Tim from Birmingham. Tim, are you there?

Hello, Andrew. I will be brief and would like to talk about facts and not emotion. Our country has the largest debt per GDP of any developed nation. It's got the highest levels of inequality and the lowest life expectancy of the G20. Now flooding has made the Midlands, you know, a marshland, and the pollution in the major cities is swiping out old communities.
[coughs]

Can't argue with that. It's been a year of unprecedented madness.

You see, we were basically out of energy and out of money. Now this offer, trade, gift, whatever you want to call it, it's come at the perfect time to save us all. And I just think our black brothers and sisters should put the country first. You know, I'm truly sorry to the woman who called in last. Really, I am. But this is about sacrifice. [coughs]

Well. Thank you, Tim from Birmingham, right next up we have Abdul from Isleworth. Abdul, hello, you're on.

Hi, Andrew. Abdul Hakim, here. Hope you're well. Hello. Quick one from me. Just want to say that I love the show. I love everything you guys do. And I just want to say one thing, I'm not going anywhere. In fact, none of us are going anywhere. I was born in Britain. I was raised in Britain, and no one can make me leave. In fact, I'm here to rob this England. I'm here to and until my I'll..." [radio cuts out, car indicators sound]

Turn it off please. I'll just get out here, thanks.

[footsteps in heels]

[door opening]

[more footsteps, heels walking]

The secret entrance Stefan, what could be so important?

I think even you can get this one. James will be joining us shortly, but wanted us to meet before. The long and the short of it is that we'll be

putting the referendum to the electorate, but the private view of our government is that we think it is a good deal, frankly, a bloody good deal. Now we know that your support on this will be key in both getting blacks and whites to vote for it, so we expect your... what did you say the other day? Steadfast commitment to His Majesty's government on this. We are in the early negotiations with the beings, but are pushing to smuggle 100 black families to Ireland if the vote goes our way. You can be in charge of drawing up that list and including yourself and your loved ones, for all the great service you've done for us.

You're loving this, aren't you?

Ah, you're already here. Ronke, I trust Stafford has got you up to speed on anything? Great, tricky situation we're in here, but some major potential benefits for everyone. We acknowledge this may not be easy, and as Stefan should have mentioned, we're going to get 150 black people out of the country to make sure at least some of you are safe. I'm afraid I can't stay too long, so I'll walk you out.

This is all a lot to consider, Prime Minister, I just wish, I wish I had some..

Nonsense! You're the sharpest tool. I have, Ronke, I know you'll do the right thing. If we get this over the line, your work won't be forgotten. There's an honor in it for you. Ronke, you have my word on that. Now, come along,

Am I not leaving the way I came?

Out of the secret entrance like some courtesan? Course not. Come on. You can use the main door.

Okay? a little conspicuous given what's going on.

No, that'll be fine.

[footsteps]

Right. Here we are everything in order.

Yeah, yes, all ready.

Great. Let's do it. Ronke come here. Let's have a hug. Come on. Mean it. Just wanted to say thank you. No hard feelings, old girl.

[paparazzi cameras, light bulbs flashing, commotion]
Deputy Prime Minister!

[muffled shouts]
[piano]

Good evening. Today, I come before you with a matter of immense significance for the future of our great nation. In a world that is changing rapidly, we must always ask ourselves the question, how do we navigate the challenges and opportunities that arise in this new age? From the industrial revolution to our pivotal role in global diplomacy, we have always faced the future with determination and hope.

But now, as we stand at a crossroads, it is time for a new approach. We are the first people on God's great Earth to have been visited, to have communicated and given asylum to life from a planet far from our own. Our brightest minds have confirmed that they are real. They are here, and they want to engage in trade with us; gold to alleviate our devastated economy, unprecedented technology to transform our lives, our borders and our environment, in exchange for our black citizens, which make up less than 2% of our nation.

Now, we are faced with a decision that will shape our country's future for generations to come. A decision that goes beyond the traditional confines of politics or party allegiance. A decision that impacts not just the direction of our economy but also the very fabric of our society and its place in the world.

It is with this in mind that I am announcing a national referendum on the offer before us. This referendum will ask you, the British people, to have your say on the future course we take. Put simply, shall we say yay to this opportunity or nay and continue along the difficult path this country has before it? The issue at hand is one of unprecedented scale and significance. It is about how we balance progress, pride, innovation and our Great British values, while remaining true to the core principles that have made our nation strong,

I have consulted widely in taking this decision, and am encouraged by the impartial, brave and positive insight from members of my Cabinet, like Dr Ronke Ada Rigby, but this will not be a decision made in the halls of Westminster alone. This is a decision that belongs to every single one of you. I will be addressing the nation in the days ahead to explain more about the options in front of us and how we can move forward together regardless of the outcome.

What I ask of you now as your Prime Minister is to approach this moment with the seriousness and commitment it deserves. This referendum is not just about the future of our country. It is not about race or history, but who we want to be as a nation, it is about ensuring that we remain a beacon of democracy and freedom for all our citizens, and have the necessary tools and resources to do so.

[rising deep bass and piano music]

The choice is yours, and I have faith that the wisdom of the people will guide us towards the right path.

Together, we will continue to build a stronger, fairer and more prosperous United Kingdom.

Thank you and may God bless our great nation.

[music fades out]

Conversation

NS

Welcome back to Episode 29 of Future Artefacts FM. You've just listened to the second half of Suley's piece Black Holes Act One, and so to start off, in

the previous episode, we listened to a Cabinet meeting that's held in response to this proposed trade from the aliens. So the aliens arrive on Earth and they offer all these wealth and materials and technologies in exchange for all black British citizens. In this episode, we hear from various citizens, both in the barber shop and radio callers. What is the significance of those characters for you? And are they based on anyone?

S

The members of the public? No, not really. I mean, they're not. I don't think they're individually based on, you know, in people that I personally know, but I think they were designed to, I guess, just give a really broad scope of reaction.

You know, obviously, as I said in the last episode, you know, there was sometimes feels like your ideology or your political view is underrepresented when you look at, you know, mainstream politics. But I wanted, for the second part of Act One to really get into the weeds of the public and conversations that people would be having in more personal, private contexts.

When you get your hair done... You know, the relationship between, I've been in barber shops, and people have been saying some very personal things in the context of getting your hair done, you know, I think some spaces, I think, just lend themselves to being a bit more honest, a bit more frank. And so I wanted to try and bring in that, that side of, that side of it.

And I also wanted to make sure I created, at least in this context and this episode, a, you know, quote, unquote black space where these conversations would be had in ways which would be very different to the formality of, say, a Cabinet meeting. And so I really wanted to kind of put those particular settings together to contrast for the radio scenes. You know, I listen to a lot of LBC. My mum listens to a lot of LBC. My mum's actually one of the actors in that radio scene. Jane from Suffolk, really, good job!

But, yeah, I guess I wanted to, you know, play with this... let's say, tropes. But you know, the angry caller who's very disgruntled and a bit angry, and,

you know, wanting to, I guess, explore the satire and the parody in that as well, but also these individuals that you know, are part of our country, you know, in who would, in this context, have a vote in this referendum, and so, you know, across those three voices you have the the individual who starts with, like “I just want to say I'm not racist”, bit which, you know, it's a trend that many of us are aware of. And, you know, sometimes it feels like the irony is not even detected.

But also wanted to have, you know, with Jane's perspective of someone who actually is part of a unit that will be impacted. And then bookmark that... bookmark Jane with Tim from Somerset, I think he is, so you know, he has much more of a, probably a more measured approach to the first male caller, but is nonetheless still, like, you know, “this is about sacrifice”. And like, you know, “it is what it is...this is this too good an offer.”

And so as the story develops, these radio call-ins are kind of littered increasingly throughout the play or the body of work. And I really want it to serve as a device in which you can directly hear from the public, away from some of the more formalised environments that you are in as part of the play.

NS

Yeah, I think particularly the moment where the radio flips and then you realize that it's Ronke who's hearing this as she's about to go and meet the prime minister, and so also that she's informing herself about, what is the attitude that's happening in the UK at that moment? How are people responding to it, you know, figuring out her own position in terms of, what am I going to do in relationship to the general public? And I think there's something that... about splitting, splitting the view. So even though you have these, these, you know, primary characters, that you have lots of opportunities within the piece to also hear outside of that. you're not inside the world of these callers. You're just getting these split moments.

S

Yeah, yeah. And I think it goes to the point I raised about, you know, feeling like you're part of a wider whole that you know Ronke in this story, in that car, will be aware that, you know, there is a wider discourse in which, you know, alongside what she's aware of in the cabinet, she's also now aware that, like, you know, the public are experiencing this. Public are talking both, you know, for and against and so, um, yeah. And guess what that starts to do to someone who already maybe feels like they're that they weren't part of this group before, but maybe they are reluctantly, maybe being grouped together.

ND

Yeah, it's funny, because actually so much of the episode is sort of... Ronke is actually kind of physically in most places throughout the whole act, but the barber shop is actually where she's not unless, do you imagine that Ronke is actually at the barber shop? Or is that a separate satellite kind of moment?

S

Yes, but, I mean she, but I wanted to give too much away. She does exist in a hair care environment like her hair stylist, and her relationship with her hair stylist is a big... an important relationship as the play develops. You know, you see Kemi Badenoch, those plaits are done by a professional. And, you know, I don't know who gets her hair done, but it's likely a black person, and so I was just... in watching a lot of her speeches in preparation for this body of work. Also, just as a person who lives in this country, I've just always imagined, like, what's that relationship like? You know, when, you know, in a traditional black environment, or maybe not traditional, but in a, you know, in an urban, familial black environment. You know, when my mum and my sisters go to get their hair done, they're often in a living room, you know, wedged between someone's legs, their kids running around, you're eating. You know, it's a really intimate environment. And obviously that differs in some places. And you know, they're also high end salons where you can get your hair done.

But I was just always wondering, like... what's that relationship like with Kemi and her hair stylist? And so that environment and that relationship does come up in Act Two. But the barber shop I wanted to really explore, you know, I guess a black male perspective, obviously biased in that way. But also it's an environment... I've been in these shops where, like, you know, people will come out of something outlandish, but also sometimes, like, really beautiful and poignant, and, you know, you're like, wow, I didn't know that that was a really tender thing to share with a group of strangers as I'm getting my hair cut. And also sometimes, like, that was too much to share. Why are you talking about this? And so I wanted to bring that conversation into it. You know, where there is a lot of skepticism, there's a lot of conspiracy, you know, but there's also a lot of education, a lot of warmth, a lot of belongings.

You know, for many people myself included, it's been a consistent space in which I'm around a lot of other black men. You know, I work in a very white environment. I have a lot of white friends, or I exist in a very white social environment sometimes here, but the barbershop was always where, and growing up is where like, you know, you are just another black boy, black man getting your hair cut. And so I really wanted to bring this story into that environment and see kind of what would happen.

ND

In the second part of the work. We understand that a referendum has been put in place. And I just wanted to ask you, what your decision to include a referendum in the story was.

S

Yeah, well, I think it's probably just trauma, I would say we've just had... So it felt like a really natural... so actually, first of all, I think there's a referendum in *Space Traders*.

ND

Oh, okay yeah.

S

Because I think one of the developments is that people are allowed to vote away from other people. But again, this was written in early 90s, late 80s. You know, it's impossible to realise what that word means to us as a nation.

ND

We have a kind of more personal Yeah, relationship to reference

S

Completely, completely, but like you hear the word and you just almost shudder like and I really appreciate what it means as a democratic and electoral device. And I think it's really inspiring in that way. But like it also... I think it exposes some of the issues with democracy in which, you know, it's important that everyone has a say in something, but when the argument is corrupted and undermined and manipulated, that say that people have by way of their vote is kind of dangerous in a way, when you're talking about, like, really important issues.

I'm not saying that we shouldn't have had, we shouldn't have had a referendum on Brexit or on the Scottish independence, but like, you know, I think we could all look back and think, like, that wasn't the way in which we thought it would be played. And I think if there is any, ever another referendum in this country, I think the rules will be very, very different. I think they ought to be very, very different. But I wanted to bring the referendum into this story, because, yeah, it just seems like it's just such a... it's really defined the time, I guess, you know, no one even remembers, really the Scottish... like the Scots do, no shade, but, like, you know, it was, we won that one, or it passed. And it was like, okay, great. "This is great. Like, look at that. You're like, great device". And then, um, 2016 and I think everyone's like...

ND

Well, the romanticism of a referendum is just sort of, gone. There's no romance in it.

NS

Yeah. I guess it's also interesting because for me I think about referendums in an Irish context. Quite often, a lot of recent ones in Ireland have been kind of these big wins in terms of rights. So like the marriage equality referendum in Ireland and being kind of the first European nation to vote in marriage equality, and it was also like this big sign of support and solidarity, of like, "no, no, we believe everyone should have this right. We've all voted for this thing." And likewise for the abortion referendum that happened in 2018 in Ireland, there was also a feeling of it had been tried to have been passed so many times before, and it was a validation of this is a right that should have always existed, and now we collectively believe that it is and it's coming into being.

And so when I think, obviously Brexit is this very demoralising and quite depressing vote, particularly as we see the ramifications of that over time. But one of the things I find interesting about the referendum in this is that a referendum to be, let's say, truly democratic, the political representatives should be impartial, and they are not here. They're very explicitly not in terms of even the negotiation between the Prime Minister and between Ronke is very much like, "support us. We know it's a referendum, but we're doing it to cover our own backs. We're not doing it because we believe in democratic process." It's a very different, yeah...

S

And I think it's a cynicism, which I think is born from, you know, recent elections, but as you say, like as a... in and of itself, I think it's a really positive way for people to say what they really think. And I think I wanted to bring it into this story in part because, in addition to the idea that you know, you want to explore, I guess, what is the mood you know, and like, if you were to have it in another way, you know, first past the post and all these other political systems that can get a bit convoluted. You know, if every person had one vote in whether this thing would happen, you know, you get a very broad understanding of the mood of a nation.

And weirdly, or maybe not weirdly, you know, most black people I tell the story to, one of the first reactions is, "oh, they'd all bear us out." And, you know, what does it mean I guess, to be that sure of... Yeah, you know, it's said in jest. And I think this is what I think I really, I'm really hoping to get out of this story is that there's a... once you get over the satire, you're left with, like, "Is this, like, is this that farfetched?" And I know it sounds really farfetched, because obviously we're talking about extraterrestrials. But like, you know, there are so many ways in which this thing could more or less happen sooner than we think potentially. And so you know, what does it also mean for a group of people, a whole community? And I'm not saying I'm speaking for everyone here, but like, you know, a lot of people I've spoken to who are like, "oh, yeah, they would if there was a if there was a referendum."

You know, the Brexit referendum was from some people a vote to kick people out, and some people were kicked out because of Brexit, or they lost their right to stay here.

ND

We've seen it before.

S

It doesn't have to be explicitly about, well, I guess, yeah, Brexit is a really good example, because there was a desire for a redistribution of wealth, you know, the 140 million a week on the NHS or something like that. Or like, there'd be, there'd be more money for us, was one of the arguments.

ND

Or more for some people, it was more jobs.

S

Exactly. So there would be this amassing of, you know, of some sort of resource or commodity or fortune. There would also be a limitation of presence of this other let's say, you know, call it the, you know, it could be it took various different forms, weirdly, often not actually European in the last

vote, yeah, but just like, there'll be less people here, and we can get back to being like Britain again.

And, you know, I think what's really confusing about Brexit was it was really hard to understand, like, what people's intentions were, and it fostered a lot of distrust and disunity, I guess, because you're on the train and you're like, "Did you vote for Brexit one? Did you vote for Brexit two? Did you vote for Brexit because of people that look like me, or because of people that look like my Romanian friends, or for any reason?" But, like, you know, we've done it, and we've and we voted. And so I think trying to bring all of these, all of the ways in which, like, the referendum has, I guess sown a lot of this distrust in this nation is the reasons why I wanted to kind of use it as a central device.

ND

Yeah, and distrust in each other, which is sort of what you're just saying that sort of like being on the train, or like being like, "Did you vote for"...

S

Yeah, I remember... because we Brexit. I was at Glastonbury that weekend, and it was a really wet year. It was quite a miserable time. But, you know, it felt like you were in this, like safe enclave of like, you know, that was like a European unity march. But then on the train home, all of the headlines on the papers were Brexit. The UK is Brexit. And I remember just ... you start to stereotype. And you're like, you know, you look at this person on the train, and you're like, you know, Are you the kind of person that I think would have voted for Brexit? And for what reasons did you vote for Brexit? And you're like, we probably have so much more that unite us than actually separate us. But again, the way that this referendum was played out actually, you know, we were all polarised, and I think it was, yeah, these are just some of the things that I was trying to explore with having this device at the center of the story.

I think this idea of, you know, the aliens offer, which comes in the form of a poem, which is, you know, to go back to your... what would you do to... I'm

trying to remember the poem now. What would you trade for for the glories of your empire to be remade. And, you know, this was, I think, an essential part of Brexit, as you say. And I think I wanted to bring it into this story, because it's an even more quick fix, you know, give you loads of gold, and we'll take away all the black people, yes or no, yes or no, and yeah.

And I think in giving it this kind of like binary, I think it makes, I think it allows people to be much more honest. You know, you don't have to worry about, well, what happens if we with Brexit, how you actually going to kick people out, or how are you going to take back control? It's the magic pill. And I think it's, you know, you're in or you're out.

NS

There's no negotiations after it's voted through.

S

no you don't even know how it happens. And that's why, you know, I think there's something which is, there's something much more malicious, I think in the offer in black holes, because you're just like, I didn't care where they go. It's almost like knowing you recycle. Sometimes you're just like, where does that cardboard paper go? I don't know.

And I really, you know, I don't think, obviously, it's a very different context, like, if you were to somehow ask this nation if they could send all the black people away as this kind of... and it was positioned in a way in which it could be done legally or, you know, definitely ethically. But like, you know, legally, I don't think we would as a nation decide to do that, but I don't think it would be like people would vote for that.

ND

Yeah,so the fact that some people would vote for it....

37:15

S

Depending on who's in power, you know, after 2029 for example, and again, it's all hypothetical. But like, you know, it's stress testing, this notion of place and belonging, I think, which, I think we've been stress testing for ages, but we're kind of like getting up to the meaty question of, like, who's in, who's out. I

ND

I think there's also something... I mean, which is not, I'm not saying something necessarily, like groundbreaking here, but also, I think the thing that I find very like sinister or worrying is sort of the weaponisation of the democratic process itself. Something that is like set out to give power back to citizens and people, is actually like a weapon which then causes destruction or hurt on groups of people or whatever. And I think there's something there in, well, in *black holes* where, like the cabinet, are using this as a, like *knowingly* using it as a weapon.

S

When democracy was set up, it wasn't... there was one, I think it was set up in a time or with an understanding that truth would be almost static, and truth would be something which, you know, you can't really manipulate, you know, and it was just much harder to influence a lot of people without like, certain facts and like and frameworks. Whereas now, you know, we're all influenced, right? And I think sometimes I definitely don't like to think I'm influenced and in the way that I often am, even just from my Instagram feed, for example, or the clothes I wear, but also, like the political ideologies that I start to adopt because I read, oftentimes one newspaper which is also crazy.

And you know, you start to feel like you're, like, pushed into a particular bubble, but like ideological set, because you're maybe not expanding the other way, but also goes for the other sides but, like, you know, other, like, ideologies and so, yeah... I think we've just all seen over the last 10 years now, how the democratic system that we have in place of a really, like, everyone has one vote and say, and I'm not trying to, you know, I'm not a proponent of totalitarianism like, you know, I guess it does seem like it's not necessarily fit for purpose in the current guise, when it's so easy to

manipulate, and I think with AI and generative technologies, it's going to be both easier to manipulate and also harder to identify how people are being manipulated. And I think that only may...only may show itself in an election or poll, or some sort of moment where it's like, "Oh, we've all decided to do this".

NS

Yeah, even my. My mom did an MSc in data analytics, and she was looking at referendum results in Ireland, and she was looking at when you were informing yourself about what choice you'd make in the vote, depending on what search terms you used, if you would get a positive or a negative response to the referendum, and how easy that was to manipulate in terms of when you have kind of larger search engines or spaces, or even when we're getting a lot of kind of media from places like Instagram, which we know are now, you know, are held by figures like Mark Zuckerberg and so forth. What does that then mean for a democratic process? You know, even X, now Musk's, I don't know, play pen, let's call it, not filtering out kind of extreme violence or extreme misogyny or extreme racism, and how that then skews again, the types of media which we're able to engage with to attempt to make informed decisions. That requirement of democracy, to kind of make the informed choice... How do we do that when the sources, which previously were so available and welcoming to us are now always trying to manipulate...the places.

S

Yeah. I don't know. Scary.

ND

Moving on from our referendum topic. Why do you think the UK was selected for this trade? And, for you,s it based on Imperial histories?

S

Yeah, well, I mean, as I was saying, like, you know, trying to center the story on what I know personally was why, and also what happened on August 7 at Kew Gardens, where I was, I was really confronted with, know

the British context and respect of racial violence, and I think also partly felt like there's, in terms of satirical content about a contemporary black experience. I'm not saying there's obviously not one black experience, but just like a black experience, you know, I think there's... I absorb so much of it that is based in America. Atlanta, as I was saying, has been a big influence. You know, things like *Slave Play*, *Tambo and Bones* like, even, like, you know, really progressive satirical theatre... the African American voices are really, really strong. And don't get me wrong, like, you know, it's, it's an important viewpoint. But I think there's also a lack of black British representation in some of these conversations around, you know, reimagining the worlds we currently live in with humor and kind of... and scathingness.

But of course, the imperial history of the UK, yeah, is like a massive part, as I was saying, of like why we may do something like this, right? And as I said you know, I think this story could be reimagined in different environments, with a different marginalised community. Be like, say it was if it was set in a country that, you know, say it was set in Germany, for example. Or maybe, I guess, for Germany... say it was set in Ireland. Let's say, you know, Ireland has a black community, you know. But Ireland also doesn't necessarily have a, doesn't have an imperial past. And so this idea of, like, wanting to get back to this status would be less relevant, and I think it would probably, it would feel much more like no a cash grab. It wouldn't necessarily sink as deep as, you know, the British environment.... I think also with Brexit, it's a big part of that.

NS

I think also kind of around historical wealth as well, in terms of, yeah, this imperialism, of like being the center, like even... I'm thinking to Monya's episode, Monya Richai, and like the way she spoke about maps, and even how that's so deeply connected to processes of colonisation, and what I'd even call, like Imperial colonisation, where the structure of the map puts the UK at the center of the world, you know, as a very visual signal of like "this is how we perceive ourselves". And I think you're right. It's, it's sort of, it's interesting thinking back to the Derrick Bell short story, because I think the US has a similar context of placing itself at the center of the world. And so

then there's almost, there's enough national ego, in a way, or like, that particular strain of national ego somehow. And that's not to say that all US citizens, or all British citizens, think this about themselves, but more in the way, kind of a political ideology is presented

S

Completely. And I think, had we not Brexited nine years ago, to me, in part, because of some of these feelings and almost aspirations, I think the story would sit very differently. But I think, you know, because we have a very recent and we're still living in it, you know, and even this idea, what did I read the other day? You know... The best back Britain... like all of these, like, Make England Great Again. You know, Tommy Robinson came out with a MEGA hats. Like, we've got MEGA hats now. It's a really weird time we live in.

I felt like people using a kind of negative interpretation of a developed nation to try and drive through their, like, divisive policies. For many people, England's great, you know, I don't think it's perfect, but, like, I don't want,... I don't want Tommy Robinson's great England. You know, someone else was wearing that hat. It'd be like, oh, yeah, cool. Like, maybe, you know, someone whose views I respect and who's maybe promoting a more peaceful and more progressive ideology, but even still, that the terminology is now that's been completely corrupted by the right. But I think this idea of trying to hark back to like bygone era is, is.. yeah, is of the time we live in. But really particular to the UK.

NS

The work exposes the role of emotion in politics, especially the scene where we have Jane calling in and saying, "you want to rip apart my family". And the politicians rely on rationalising the deal, and even this caller who says, "I'm not racist, but" and then the second male caller who also speaks about kind of "but if we're talking pragmatically, like let's talk about it". And one of the things I kept on thinking about when listening to your work was Lola Olufemi's book *Experiments In Imagining Otherwise*, and how she speaks about rights and the role of humanisation, and I think also kind of being uninterested in a form of politics that exists without care.

And there's this quote that I want to bring up from that book where she says, "What good is it to talk about rights if people do not have means? I want to ask, How do rights fail us, and what would happen if instead we supported each other's claims to a livable life? What does a claim do that a right cannot? What would a pact do?" And so this, yeah, this question about rationalisation and emotion. And within that, my question about this work is, then, who is the audience for this? And do you want the audience to kind of move through this space of kind of emotionally connecting or kind of attempting to rationalise the proposition?

S

Yeah, that's a great question. So I think you know, going back to this idea of interest convergence, and whether progress stops when it's not in the interest of the dominant group. Despite being a black person, and there being a lot of black cultural references in this story, and a lot of blackness, I guess my blackness in the story. I think the actual... the audience is probably, I don't say white people, but like, you know, it's it. It's people for whom this story would actually, well, it's people who would have power, if the story was real, to change this ending or decide this ending, I guess, you know.

I think it's important for everyone to see this work, obviously, and hopefully everyone will see it when it manifests in the way I hope it does. But, you know, I think the audience that I really have in mind, I think, well, the audience that I think could... with which the story could really resonate, are those who, yeah, in this fictional world, would have the power to to influence this vote. And so in that case, I don't think it's written for the white gaze, but I guess there is a way in which... I think there's something for everyone in this story. Obviously, I'd say that, but I think it's particularly relevant to those who maybe haven't thought about these stories, you know, because when, as I said, you know, like a lot of the black people I describe the story to, I show it to, you know, their reaction is, they throw us away in a heartbeat.

The idea of interest convergence is different for everyone, right? There are loads of different ways in which we can set aside our self interest. And so, you know, I guess, in the racial context - and because this show, this story

so much about racial groups - maybe the primary audience are white people because it's a much easier relationship to the underlying theme. But you know, as a black person watching it, you know they may understand or see that, you know they can set aside their gender based privilege for the advancement of a better whole as a society, or their ableist privilege, or like, you know? I think there are always ways in which you can think about as I was saying on the last show. You know how your own... it's not just privilege, I guess, but you know your drive towards bettering your own situation, or maintaining your own situation can impact or take away from someone else's. And so I think in terms of audience, I would say it's... there won't be like tears to it, but all are welcome, obviously. But in the context of the quote, when does a right become a claim. Was it?

NS

How do rights fail us, and what would happen if instead we supported each other's claims to a livable life?

S

So as I said, rights are only, I would argue, as good as their enforceability systems. I feel like a claim brings in that enforcement right. You have a you, you take your claim to a place, maybe, or a claim is only as good as the environment in which it can be almost cashed in.

ND

Or as good as the lawyer who's...

NS

...or the community that you're supported by as well. Yeah.

S

So I think there's, you know, a claim suggests that there's some sort of way in which you intend to uphold this thing, and that could be community based, that can be, you know, in the legal systems. But I think the idea is that there's, like, you've got this piece of paper of the right, but actually, like,

you know, it's, it's worth something in a claim, maybe, at least, I hope, that would be what it's about.

ND

In the UK, as soon as you make something, it is technically your intellectual property, but you have to prove that you were the first person that made it. So, like, ideologically, it's yours, but at the end of the day, you have to be able to prove a date, a timestamp or whatever. So there's like this... I guess, in terms of, like, if copyright is also a right, like, there's sort of, like, rights can be a sort of an idea, but then there's sort of, like, the practicalities of how you exercise it, maneuver within that sort of system. That's like a sort of, I know we're not talking about copyright necessarily, but, like..

S

...but, yeah, I think it's the, it's the looks like a natural next step, once you have the right, okay, you then claim the right, like, you know, yeah, this you've got... I was gonna say...

ND

You have to do the work of, like, there's labor involved in claiming of the right.

S

And I think you hold so it's, there's an accountability, I think, to a claim, you know, both in the person who the individual or system or whatever, that has restricted your right. But there's also the, I guess, the pride and the dignity of the person who's trying to assert their claim. And I wonder whether that's something which, yeah, is aspirational. Because I feel like, at times, you know, and going back to, sorry, because you have the Gaza Coca Cola, you know, like, I think, like, the situation in Palestine. You know, there are rights, but without a robust legal system, international order, you know, these things almost don't exist. And I think it's strange having been... my work previously in human rights, where, you know, you these systems have really... so much work has gone into developing this system, and it's used very selectively to uphold and to hold certain individuals or nations or

systems to account. But when it fails, or it feels like it's failing, it feels like it can be quite disheartening, I guess, and it can fail in a very particular way, or a very dramatic and costly way. And so I wonder whether Olufemi's quote is a way to, kind of try and rekindle, I guess that...

ND

Or faith... to look at the legal system as like a, as a sort of, not a church, but, like, there is a sort of belief there's a belief system, I guess, in the sense that there's trying to make life do one, as you would to others, or, like, you know, create this sort of way of existing in the world and when it, when it doesn't uphold those values, you lose faith. Like, yeah,

S

It goes back to the political systems and, like, you know, how we decide and vote and referendums. Like, you know, if almost was, like, if this doesn't work, then, like, what, what do we what do we have?

ND

The legal system is kind of almost this, like, base level, like, code of how we live, and when that doesn't function properly, it's actually quite scary.

S

Yeah, yeah. And I again, I don't know if we've ever really... we haven't, well, we've lived through times when these rights and these systems have just been ignored. And we've all now acknowledged that these were grave times to have lived in, lived through where, like, you know, mass atrocities were committed. But it feels like we're kind of back in a space where, you know, political systems, democratic systems, legal systems, are still kind of being ignored, but also being used selectively. And I think it just, it does make you wonder, like, yeah, what's the foundation of all of this, if, like, none of it really exists as you thought it did.

NS

Yeah. And I guess there's one, there's something I keep on thinking about as well as, like, I guess also, as you're talking about the audience, that thinking about a white gaze and sort of..., it's a story that's when you're white, it's not directly impacting you, let's say like you would, you wouldn't be the person who would be taken away, but as a black person listening the story you would. And thinking about when we're having conversations about race or about marginalisation as well, it's like when you are of the community that is being marginalised, being both the person who's, let's say, the better speaker in that conversation to talk about your experience or or kind of... but also being sort of on the emotion that you have about your own identity being kind of weaponised in some way against you, that you have to form it into a very rational response in order for it to be perceived or respected in the way that the nonmarginalised person will accept it more readily.

S

Yeah, well, there's a, there's a moment where Ronke is talking and Stefan, who's the like Robert Jenrick figure, her nemesis in this story... it's like, you know, "I'm really disappointed that you're so affected, you can be so impartial about this". The idea that you could be expected to be impartial and not personal about something which is inherently personal is farcical, but I think it is something which comes up often. I definitely had it... experienced that in conversations, in difficult conversations, where you know you can feel yourself getting almost worked up about something which is really particular and key to your community and yourself to someone who kind of...

ND

Where you're like, I'm losing, like, I'm losing here...

S

Whereas, this is real for me whereas, you know, this is a debate for you. This is some sort of, you know, abstract idea.

NS

It's a dinner party conversation. Where you drop it at the dinner party? I don't...

S

Exactly, exactly, like, you know, it can really rattle you. And I wanted to bring in this kind of dynamic into, you know, the experience with Ronke... but I think also the wider idea of who this piece is for. And even hearing you talking about, you know, what it feels like, I guess, when you're part of a group, which, I guess is, you know, in this story, at the mercy of a wider group, which is, I would argue, a microcosm of wider society. You know, I'm really keen that this piece isn't... it's not designed to be traumatic for black people or marginalised communities. And, you know, I've tried to both center black experiences in the story and also use comedy to try and kind of lighten it.

But I do... when I think about what I want people to leave with, you know, I think I would want... I'd want a white listener to leave and think, you know, "that's crazy, first of all", you know, "that would never happen here". I'm imagining what that thought process is, but then, I don't want it to feel like, "Oh, that's a crazy story. And in that world, that thing happened or didn't happen. But that's never happened here". The idea would be like, you know, "how does this relate to my own experience and the power that I have and the power I have to make other people's lives better", I guess, and I think that's true of everyone. And so I guess that's the kind of overriding takeaway, hopefully.

ND

Okay, I think we're gonna end there. We're at 47 minutes. Okay, thank you so much Suley for doing this two part marathon with us.

NS

Yeah, I think this is like the shortest... usually we get through... we've only got through four questions.

S

I talk a lot sorry...

Ns

No, it's perfect.

NS

I know Suley that you have a lot of big plans and steps coming next in terms of this piece. Where is a good place where people can follow and keep up with what's happening? I mean, this episode is coming out in August of 2025 so it's coming out quite in the future. So how can people stay up to date?

S

My Instagram, suley dot art, S, U, L, E, Y, dot art. My website, www dot suley dot art. You can email me info at suley dot art, but I think most of it's going to be probably through my Instagram, and hopefully by August, there'll be some exciting updates as to where you may be able to see this next flesh. Yeah, who knows.

NS

Okay, great. Until then. Until then.

ND

Thank you. Bye.