

Edwina Throsby: From the Sydney Opera House, this is It's a Long Story. A podcast that uncovers the lives and stories behind the ideas.

Raj Patel: The work that I've been doing has always been work of amplification. My job is to fade into the background so that activists take the space that I've been fighting to hold.

ET: What do you do when you decide at the age of seven that the world is an unfair place and you need to try and change it? Raj Patel's career has been dedicated to ending inequality. From studying philosophy, politics and economics at Oxford, London School of Economics and Cornell, to learning about the inner workings of the World Trade Organisation and the World Bank as an intern, Raj was always going to be an activist. His writing about capitalism and contemporary politics is globally influential, and he continues to look for ways to change the political and economic systems that we live in.

Raj Patel, welcome to It's a Long Story at the Sydney Opera House.

RP: Thank you, Edwina.

ET: You were born into a family that owned a corner shop in Golders Green in North London. What sort of community was that that you grew up in?

RP: It was a community of—I mean my earliest memories are of my family, of my extended family. My father was able to make a real go of the corner shop, and then brought over brother by brother from India, and a sister as well, and so I remember—some of my earliest memories are about having these big family gatherings with my dad's extended family.

ET: So what were your parents like? Your father was a store kid. What kind of person was he?

RP: I mean they're both whip-smart. They're really very, very intelligent and inquisitive, and you know, when I was growing up, like my dad, I have this thing where like I need something on all the time. You know, I just want information. And so he always had the radio on and the TV on and a bunch of other thing, and he was always reading and listening, and neither of them went terribly far. I mean my dad didn't make it into secondary school, and my mum made it just now to secondary school, but both of them are incredibly intelligent, really have an insatiable appetite to learn about the world, and they still do. You know, right now, wherever, you know, whatever time it is, there's definitely a telly and a radio on in our house.

ET: Why was it that they weren't able to pursue formal education?

RP: Well, poverty, and also just, you know, a broken family on my mother's side, and so it was just very hard for them to make it into secondary school or beyond.

ET: Did them growing up in poverty influence the way that they raised their own children?

RP: Oh, absolutely. Yeah. I mean for them, they were deeply sad that they weren't able to use, you know, and learn from the university, and so for us, you know, my brother and I were tutored and given absolutely as much encouragement as we could to do well at school.

ET: You've written that—and I'm quoting you here—“First-born sons of British-Asian families aren't so much raised as fated, and as a child, I become quite comfortable being a little prince.” How do remember being treated? When you wrote that, what were you remembering?

RP: I mean I guess it was just the sort of honour and privilege of patriarchy. I mean what I was remembering was being able to, you know, to be pushed to the front of a queue where there's, you know, food to be shared at a wedding or something like that, and you know, it's like oh, it's him, whereas my brother never got that. And you know, when I remember my relationship with him, it was entirely unfair, and although pangs of that may have occurred to me at the time and certainly in reflection, now that I think about the desperate injustice of that, let alone, you know, how I sat in the community of my other cousins—

ET: Does your brother carry any resentments around that?

RP: He would be foolish not to, but you know, for as much emphasis that was given to the building of our, you know, academic abilities, emotional conversational ability still remained fairly undeveloped.

ET: Do you think that that's culturally British?

RP: I mean it's the perfect storm of British reticence and, you know, sort of Hindu inability to talk about anything emotional.

ET: You've described yourself as an atheist Hindu.

RP: There's a book that some friends from college gave me called [Am I a Hindu?](#), and the answer is yes. It doesn't matter who you are reading the book. The answer is you're probably a Hindu, because it's such an ill-specified religion that, you know, either you're born into it or you are and you just don't know it, and that, you know, the sort of cultural histories of, you know, reading comic books about Hindu heroes and going to one temple after another, clean up. That's fairly indelible, I think, and so in so far as it's common to talk about someone being culturally Jewish, I think it's fair enough to say that I'm culturally Hindu, and though I also find it an abhorrent religion, and the more I, you know, read about it, the more I think it's desperately troubling, everything from the caste-based violence that accompanies it to the fact that you never hear anyone talk—you know, you hear about liberation theology, liberation Christianity. There's no such thing as liberation Hinduism because that would run counter to some of the very basic tenets of how the religion is currently structured. And so, you know, if you want liberation Hinduism, you have to look to organisations and religions like Sikhism, for example, which has very much a sort of social justice mission, but within Hinduism, there's not much that resonates with anything that I see myself as being in the world.

ET: Well, there isn't a huge impetus within the Hindu sort of framework for revolution when you're sort of waiting for the next life to be rewarded.

RP: Right. I mean dharma is precisely about finding what it is that your purpose is, and it turns out that your purpose is what other people tell you it is and, you know, has everything to do with where you're born and how it is that you fit within a fairly well ordained hierarchy, and as someone who doesn't like hierarchy very much, that stinks.

ET: You've spoken a lot about an event in your childhood on a family trip to India where you're in a car and a girl who was begging, a little girl who was begging, was knocking at the window, and in that moment, you became aware for the first time, really, that there was this sort of injustice, that you and your brother in the car were lucky children who weren't hungry, and this girl outside, for completely random and incomprehensible reasons—

RP: Yeah.

ET: —was far, far less fortunate. Was that followed by—was that a moment of revelation? You've spoken about it a lot.

RP: I've been reading a lot about how it is that activists have conversion experiences, I mean, well, how anyone has a conversion experience. The French philosopher Alain Badiou has this very interesting relationship with the figure of Saint Paul, for example. I mean how is that you can have this moment where it's like oh, my God, now I see that light. What's that like, and how is it that you can share that? But for me, from the inside, it didn't feel like, you know, the clouds parted and a ray of light shone down by any means. What it felt like was oh, this is not okay and it's continuing not to be okay, and it stuck with me, and insofar as something sticks with you, that, it seems to me, is what it's like to have an experience of conversion. It's not that all of sudden, you're lifted. It's just you can't rid of something. Something sits in your mind and it doesn't go. And so for me, the experience of that translated into, well, all right, we came back from India, and then a few days later, school started, and so I was renting out my toys at Kindergarten, and yeah, we got 50p or a pound or something, and we managed to send that off to famine relief. And it was that experience of like oh, yeah, well, this is okay. You know this is a start to making change and, you know, we'd watch the news and see where the famine stops. It turns out that the 50p to family relief doesn't do a whole lot, though of course that's not to say you shouldn't do it. It's just for me, it was the experience of the sensation we all have of that's not fair, and it just doesn't go away, and then, you know, the rest of my life is figuring out what to do with that.

ET: Yeah. I mean but, you know, it's not just “that's not fair”. It's “that's not fair and I might be able to do something about it”.

RP: Well, it's that's not fair and I can't *not* do something about it because it's not something that's going away. So you know, in a sense, it is that's—it's not a burden. It's just, you know, if we had to use sort of cliched terms, it would be like a meme or a sort of mind worm or something. It just doesn't get out of your head.

[Music interlude]

ET: So can you trace a direct line from, you know, that kind of childhood moment recognition of injustice through to the way that your career evolved, your decision to study economics?

RP: I mean I think so, just because I—and I was looking from that time onwards to see, well, all right, what's making this fairness or this unfairness go away, and whether that was, you know, raising money for charity or volunteering. Then when my academic abilities kind of blossomed when I was 11, then all of a sudden, I was able to sort of match the inclination with the ability, and I wanted to see what worked, and so I was interested in the social milieu in Britain at the time, which was about Thatcherism, and I

was interested in who it is people were pushing back against what seemed to be palpably unfair about Thatcherism, and that meant, you know, going on the street protests and everything from the campaign for nuclear disarmament. CND was a very big part of what it was to resist the creep of militarism and injustice and Britain's participation in it, to groups that were exploring socialism and were particularly fighting fascists. Social experiments had their corollaries in other things I was looking at, and I was like oh, great. So the discipline that seems to encompass all of this is economics, and in the end, I was admitted to Oxford to study philosophy, politics, and economics. And before I got there, I changed my mind, and I said well, actually, bigger than all of these things is mathematics, and since I was good enough to be able to talk my way into the mathematics programme there, I did that instead and then realised, A, I wasn't as good as I thought I was, but A, although, you know, economics often aspires to a condition of maths, it doesn't get you anywhere in solving some of the most intractable social problems. You know, there are those who might beg to differ now in the era of big data who would be able to throw their data sets and say well, look at what it is that we're able to see about the world through mathematics, but I was developing not just an intellectual toolkit, but also a theory of change. How is it that the world actually changes? And increasingly, it seemed to me that the way the world changed was not through experts producing equations so much as people fighting in the streets, and that's why, you know, I shifted back to doing—

ET: PPE.

RP: —PPE, and particularly around philosophy, because it wasn't just about fighting in the streets, but I was still looking for that big systemic change, and so I ended up studying a lot of Spinoza, which is something I'm coming back to now because it seems that there are some very deep connexions between humans and the rest of the web of life that Spinoza was kind of first on the scene to be able of theorise in some interesting ways. And I'm excited to be able to, you know, come full circle, as it were, from this mathematical understanding through Spinoza back to where I am now.

ET: So let's get back to teenage activist Raj. As you are finding your sort of political compass, if you like, and navigating all of that, were your parents supportive of this emerging radical? What were their politics?

RP: My parents are conservative, and nonetheless, they were excited that I was thinking for myself, and they understood the sort of charitable impulse, because good conservatives do. They understand how charity works, and where I was heading was understanding that crumbs from the table are not going to cut it, and the way that they parsed what I was doing was to see it as charity, and the way that I understood it was as social change. But even now, I mean we disagree violently on politics, particularly around Hinduism, but they appreciate that, you know, where I'm coming from is a place that looks at systemic change and probably, you know, that they, in their quieter moments, might admit that systemic change is probably what's necessary.

ET: And presumably, too, as a teenager, it really honed your arguing skills if you were required to defend your position.

RP: Yeah. It certainly did, but more I think it was about—you know, I mean it's that hormonal cocktail of youthful rebellion, you know, and sort of finding out that actually taking these unpopular positions with one's parents wins the affections of, you know,

them over there at the girls' school. So you know, I mean there was nothing pure about those, about this intellectual journey, at all, but nonetheless, I mean it helped to be able to have them both to push against, but also to recognise that no matter what I thought, they would still love me. I'm imagining I'm going to have that wrought on me by my family as well when, you know, my kids become stockbrokers or something.

ET: So you've described yourself as having anarchist sympathies. I'd like to talk more about that in a bit, but as a student, you worked for the WTO and the World Bank. Now presumably, your anarchist side was developing at this point. What made you want to work within those organisations? Where were your politics around that?

RP: So the World Trade Organisation was easy. I mean I just wanted to know what it was like, and as it happens, if you can say that you've got an economics credential from Oxford and you come with a posh enough voice, you can blag your way into a place like that, so that's what I did as intern, and I ended up doing some economic analysis for them around environmentalism and trade. You know, the question they were asking was does trade harm the environment, and the easy answer is yes, because, you know, you have more stuff produced on either side of the trading relationship and that will damage the environment. The slightly more sophisticated answer is well, no, because in the end, you know, as people get richer, they have a preference for reducing pollution, and that is how it is that trade gets people further along this inevitable trajectory of not wanting pollution. And the third answer is yes, that's true, but the way that people get rid of pollution is by exporting their pollution to a third country, and so yes, you can exercise your preference for less pollution by just chucking it somewhere else, and that's what trade lets you do. And so I explored that, and what was interesting to me was to see, first of all, that there wasn't necessarily anyone at the World Trade Organisation who was an evil genius in a black swivel chair sort of stroking a cat. It wasn't, you know, that sort of Donald Pleasance mode of yes, we will destroy this economy by making them pollute it. But instead it was a far more quotidian, more banal approach of well, yeah, you know, when someone from Friends of the Earth comes in with an economic analysis and that goes straight into the bin, whereas when someone from Motorola comes in, it becomes policy. And seeing that at work at close quarters was very—it was important to me to understand what it was that good people were doing. And at the World Bank, I was given the opportunity by my supervisor at Cornell University to see the World Bank's grey literature and classified literature on poverty and to analyse it and show how it is that the World Bank—you know, what the World Bank thought in its most unguarded moments about poverty, and I was absolutely down with that programme. That was a very interesting experience for me because I found myself being brought closer and closer to the very organisation and the politics that I didn't particularly care for, and so I even once, drunkenly, at a party mounted a sort of half-assed defence of the World Bank, saying well, you know, if the World Bank doesn't give these development funds, who's going to do it, which is precisely the opposite of what I had believed, you know, a couple of months prior.

ET: What had happened?

RP: Well, I mean I found myself caught in a position where I was in this job. I needed to get the job done. I needed to get it done as well as I could given the constraints of the organisation. And so even though I'd seen, you know, the most radical bits of what we'd found in the World Bank literature discarded and set aside and instead the blame being put on the police or on the state in one way or another and never the finger of blame

being pointed at the World Bank, I'd become complicit, and for me, I mean, it was a very interesting process of recognising that in myself. In the end, I quit a week after my supervisor did, you know, under similarly intolerable circumstances for him, but it was very interesting and, you know, I'm still kind of writing that up under the title *J'accuse*, but, you know, it's important, I think, to recognise how it is that these institutions can themselves produce certain kinds of people and certain kinds of politics that accompany them.

ET: Well, I mean when you're part of an organisation and surrounded by people who are essentially good people, you know, and you're working for a common cause, what that cause is sometimes gets lost.

RP: Right, and particularly when you go into the World Bank and you see these gorgeous pictures of these beautiful African girls smiling at you and the mission of the World Bank, "Our dream is a world without poverty", and you see that every day and you're told every day you are fighting poverty, it becomes much easier for you to say well, you know, maybe peasants don't really belong in rural areas and we need to move them to urban areas, and we'll call this 'land mobility' and, you know, the land stays where it is, but actually, it's the people on it who need to move out the way for the sake of efficiency so we can fight poverty. And all of a sudden, you start saying the most absurd things, which, you know, good data can help undermine, but the sort of creeping politics of technocracy, of a few experts deciding the fate of many and never really suffering the consequences when they screw up—those kinds of politics are what the World Bank is built around.

[Music interlude]

ET: At around the time that you left, that sort of coincided in time, in history with a rise of anti-corporate, anti-big institution protests—

RP: That's right.

ET: —which you were part of. Looking at protests then, which was very much sort of on the streets, with placards and that kind of thing, how effective was that, and what did it achieve?

RP: Well, so we managed to stop through the late 1990s and early 2000s a lot of trade agreements and investment agreements that today Donald Trump would be railing against. So for example, the Multilateral Agreement on Investment was something mooted in the late 1990s. You haven't heard of it because it didn't happen, and it didn't happen because there was quite a lot of, you know, a groundswell against it and a lot of mobilising and organising that stopped this essentially sort of manifest over bankers from passing. The World Trade Organisation meetings in Seattle in 1999 similarly were, you know, collapsed in part of because of the street protests. Also because of the vast disrespect that was shown to the Africa group by the United States from within the World Trade Organisation. But in order, you know, those, you know, just to be able to pause or, you know, to put a hold on those agreements was one thing, but for me, street protests are also important because it's a chance to build coalition.

ET: Where you do think we are with activism and protest now?

RP: One of the ways that activism bubbled up for me [was through the food movement](#), in the United States and a number of places, the food movement became not a Trojan horse, but a way of pulling together a lot of the criticisms that had been part of, you know, the anti-globalisation movement in ways that were hearable, that were audible for a generation that had tuned out the sort of language of anti-capitalist struggle. And so I mean I think for a good decade and a half, the food movement became a very important way of spreading ideas about well, all right, what would it be like if food were a right? What would it be like if we were to grow food in ways that didn't involve cruelty to animals? What would it be like if we grew food in ways that sequestered carbon? All of a sudden, you know, the big—

ET: Didn't exploit women.

RP: Exactly. There we are. I mean so the—and the idea is that you could engage in debates around the food system and then take on patriarchy and racism and capitalism, but without naming it explicitly, at least, you know. I think it was a very useful way in which some of this activism was sort of sublimated into other forms.

ET: And food is such a universally required thing.

RP: Right.

ET: I mean it is the universally required thing, really, so everybody has some kind of personal buy-in to a food movement, in a sense. What was it? Did you have a relationship with food that sort of pre-existed this? You know, what is your non-political relationship with food, if that can even be a thing?

RP: Well, I mean my initial relationship with food was entirely dysfunctional. I mean getting back to the convenience store, you know, I was allowed free range of everything that was downstairs in the stockroom, so I grew up on the trajectory that my parents have since ended up on of, you know, high blood sugar and, you know, fatty foods, you know, and sort of too much salt and sugar and what have you.

ET: It does sound like a total childhood fantasy, though.

RP: You know, I was a kid in a convenience—I mean a kid in a candy store, so, you know, but it was actually through the protests and through meeting social movements that my relationship to food became political, and particularly through the protests of the World Trade Organisation, but also afterwards, through engaging with groups like La Via Campesina's international peasant movement that now has 200 million members around the world, I was able to sort of understand much better how it is that food might look, and it turns out I quite like pleasure. I hadn't really appreciated this about myself, that really good food is something that I thought was for wankers, and it turns out that you can have really good food and not spend a crap-tonne of money on it, but it be prepared in ways that are entirely joyous and joyful, and that was something that was a bit of a revelation. That it was possible to be able to, you know, convene and come together and think seditious thoughts while enjoying yourself because, you know, in Britain, you know, the sort of left of the 1980s and 90s was if you're having fun, you're doing it wrong.

ET: That's right. The kind of application of a Protestant work ethic—

RP: Yeah.

ET: —to the protests.

RP: And also, you know, the translation of a certain sort of Soviet aesthetic—

ET: Right.

RP: —to, you know, the rest of the planet, where it's like well, you know, it's borscht for everyone, and to have groups like the Italian sort of communists and anarchists and slow food, for example, lead the way by saying well, actually, no, you know, we're working to democratise pleasure, that seemed to me something I could get on board with.

ET: Yes! I like that in your writing, that sort of association with—I like that in your writing, that insistence that the protest can be inherently pleasurable and in fact can enable pleasure for a lot of people, you know, that access to food and access to these kinds of things is not just a right. It can be bloody lovely as well.

RP: And I think that that's—I mean that's the other thing that I'm sort of exploring now, just to get back to the Spinoza idea—is if Spinoza's right and we're all connected to everything in every possible way, why—yeah, our sensual lives are really very attenuated. You know, we're told that we have the five senses, but it turns out that the proper number's about 17 for every individual—you know, a sense of itching, a sense of heat, a sense of dizziness, whatever it is. But those aren't the only senses we have. I mean most of our lives are built developing social senses, whether it's, you know, a sense of fun, a sense of gambling, a sense of danger, whatever it is. These ideas are social senses that we can use to connect to the rest of the world, and I think part of me, it wants to—I mean certainly, my project at the moment is just sort of to think about well, what's that like? What is it to be connected to the world in different ways? And food is a really great way of reestablishing a connexion that's been denied to so many of us for so long. I'm not only insisting on that connexion, but I'm sort of doubling down on it right now.

ET: So at the end of this period, your career had been going extremely well, but then at some point, you were declared the messiah. That must have come out of left field.

RP: Yes, it was odd. I mean I was on book tour with a book called *The Value of Nothing*, and it had turned out, unbeknownst to me, the day before or a few days before I was going to be on *The Colbert Report*, which is a big TV show in the US, that there had been a prophecy made of a man born in 1972 who came to London in 1975 from India and, you know, who worked in the East End of London and was interested in poverty and sharing and who carried a water bottle with him and stuttered, and all of these things can be said to be true of me, and so when I appeared on telly, it turns out that that fulfilled the prophecy, and all of a sudden, [I was declared the Buddha Maitreya](#).

ET: Because a sort of little-known Scottish mystic called Benjamin Creme had decided that this messiah was going to appear on an international television programme at some point on the precise date that you were on *Colbert*.

RP: Right.

ET: I mean that is quite a set of circumstances.

RP: It's odd. I'm not going to say it isn't. But you know, the irony is that I'm the person who is least interested in being the messiah, because all the work that I've been doing—you know, we've been talking about this intellectual history, about how it is that actually, my theory of change is about individuals seizing, collectively seizing, power and transforming their own worlds rather than waiting for some bloke to come along and do it for them.

ET: Correct. You've actually written "I don't think a messiah figure is going to be a terribly good launching point for the kind of politics I'm talking about. For someone who has very strong anarchist sympathies, this has some fairly deep contradictions."

RP: Yeah, but of course, you know, I tried saying that half a dozen different ways, including "I'm not the messiah. I'm a very naughty boy," you know, because it's like being inside of *Life of Brian*, and just like in *Life of Brian*, when Brian says he's not the messiah, you know, everyone sort of just repeats him and nauseam and, you know, part of this prophecy is that of course I will say I'm not the messiah. That's what the messiah is meant to do. So I'm stuck with it for now, at least.

ET: I mean and the other thing that—yeah, sorry. So and what sort of impact did that have on your life? Because it was quite a dramatic impact.

RP: The thing they don't tell you when they tell you you're the messiah is that there will be a small and violent group of people who think that you're the Antichrist, and so that meant, you know, getting off social media and certainly severing connexions with my family just for their safety, because people started writing about oh, yes, no, well, you know, when the unbelievers come and kill you, don't worry, we'll take care of your family, which is not the sort of thing—

ET: No.

RP: —you want to find in your inbox.

ET: No, your children raised by unbelievers.

RP: So yeah, so and that meant the kind of activism I, you know, ended up doing was much more sort of behind the scenes, and in any case, that's sort of where I want to end up. The work that I've been doing has always been work of amplification rather than—you know, I mean I do original research, but most of the ideas that I'm writing about are ideas that have come to other activists long before they've come to me, and what I'm doing is putting them in conversation with one another, and ultimately, you know, my job is to fade into the background so that the activists in, you know, sub-Saharan Africa or in Malawi or in Oakland or in Detroit or wherever it is can take the space that currently I've been sort of fighting to hold, because it's not my job to be a mouthpiece, but it's a job to be, you know, in solidarity with and a coconspirator with them.

[Music interlude]

ET: A lot of your work is underpinned by a implied belief that change is possible, you know, a hope that people can actually bring about a better future. You've written, and I quote, "We see the need to dream for more radical change than contemporary politics offers." What is wrong with contemporary politics, do you think? What are its limitations, and how can we change them, or is that not the answer? Do we need revolution?

RP: The walls that are put up for participation in contemporary politics is one of the reasons why so many people have contempt for it. So you know, if you look at who's trusted in society, politicians are sort of—

ET: Pretty low on the list.

RP: Yes. The Australian expression I was taught once was "lower than shark shit." I'm not sure whether that's actually an Australian expression.

ET: I've never heard it.

RP: It's fair enough when we are told that the limits of participation are write to your elected representative or, you know, vote the buggers out, and if those are the two things that you can do, of course you're going to be frustrated with not being able to be invited to dream what it is that you would like for yourself and your family and your future and your community. So I do think that we need a break with this kind of politics or, you know, to put it another way, what we're peddled is democracy, and I would like to see that. I quite like democracy. I just don't think we live in one. I don't think anyone does, and that's because democracy—I mean the last and most unimportant thing about democracy is the voting. I'm interested in that bit, and a lot of people are, and when I look at the kinds of change I've seen and, you know, I've been privileged to see, where communities in Northern Malawi, for example, end patriarchy, and to be able just to say that and to be able to see it happen and to document it over the course of years, that's a very radically different kind of thing than you can get at the ballot box. There's never the option to end patriarchy on a ballot. That's not how ballots work. Ballots are there to constrain choices, to reduce them, and it seems to me that politics should be about opening up those choices. So I like the idea of politics, but that means breaking with the past, and does that mean being revolutionary? Well, it's a word that I had to make my peace with, but if I'm insisting that actually the way that we distribute resources at the moment is unfair, as I've been saying since I was five years old, and I'm saying that actually there's some deep injustices that need to be corrected and we need to transform the way we consume and we can't go on, you know, destroying the ecology of which we are a part in the way that we are at the moment, I mean these are fairly radical statements, and does it take a revolution in thinking and acting in order to be able to reach those changes? I think it probably does.

ET: In your book *The History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*, which you co-wrote, you use a phrase called the 'Capitalocene', saying that we are living not in the Anthropocene, as people like to say, but in an era that is defined by its adherence to capitalism, but you also say, and again, I'm quoting you, "Much of capitalism cannot be reduced to economics. Cultures, states, and scientific—cultures, states, and scientific complexes must work to keep humans obedient to norms of gender, race, and class." We normally think about capitalism as being about the dollar value and as being completely focussed, but while acknowledging that, you also call for a recognition that the structures of capitalism infuse everything. How do you sort of resolve that it's all about the dollar, but it's about everything else paradox?

RP: I mean in order for markets to work, you need police forces, you know, because I mean I can't just go into a store and pick something up and say well, I think this is worth about a buck. That's what I'm leaving on the table. Bye-bye, because soon enough, there will be a representative of the state, you know, usually someone from a police force,

who will set me straight. So you know, we recognise that markets can't work, you know, or can't—in order for markets to be the rule, transgressing them needs to be policed, and then, well, let's look at how it is that, you know, the work of producing things happens in a capitalist economy. Well, that means that someone goes out and someone stays at home and looks after the kids, and those norms, again, are ones that you see replicated through structures of patriarchy in our society, for example. And then you have well, yeah, this work is particularly egregious and we, you know, the original settlers of this land couldn't see ourselves doing it. Why don't we find some other people to do it? And so all of a sudden, there are ways in which people of colour and women again are treated as second-class, disposable workers. These are institutions where in order for the dollar value to look the way that it does, you need these sort of chains of exploitation in order, you know, to be able to get to this dollar value. Dollars don't manufacture themselves. And so that sort of myth of the free market of, you know, enlightened exchange happening between consenting parties—again, I mean I like the idea of people entering into free exchange. You know, I think that's terrific, but that's the opposite of what capitalism is. Capitalism is about the enforcement of different logics of accumulations, so that most people who enter into sort of capitalist relations do so unwillingly.

ET: It's said that capitalism relies on the human urge toward self-interest, you know, the desire to better oneself, the desire to sort of constantly be generating profit, getting bigger, but I wonder sometimes if capitalist societies actually also depend in many ways on the altruism of people.

RP: Absolutely.

ET: Because if we were to live in a truly capitalist society, it would be a hideous shark tank in which everybody would rip each other apart.

RP: Right.

ET: Where do you think the role of altruism is, and do you think that that's true, that if people weren't naturally in some way altruistic then the capitalist system would actually end?

RP: Absolutely. I mean how else can you explain why it is that when bodies are broken, you know, in production systems that those workers have families to go to who will take care of them? More importantly, even though the myth of, you know, the fact that we're all selfish and greedy bastards is, you know, a popular myth, it's not true. There's a game called a reciprocity experiment where, you know, someone will come into this room and give you, Edwina, a dollar, and the game is you decide how much of that dollar to give to me, and then I decide whether to accept that or no one gets anything. Those are the two options. So how much would you give me?

ET: Oh, you can have the dollar, Raj.

RP: Oh, that's very sweet of you, but then in some societies, I would be like oh, no, I see what you're doing, because next time that you want me to do something, you'll be like but I gave you that dollar that time, so no, you keep that dollar. I don't want to be obliged to you. In Western societies, usually people will, someone, say 50-50. Well, maybe not. You know, Edwina, you keep 60 and I'd get 40, and I'd be like all right, fine. You were lucky enough to be given the dollar first. Fine. You know, okay. But it varies

according to society, but also within, you know, what passes for Western civilisation, the people with are the most selfish and greedy are graduate students in economics. Like the people who will keep the most, who believe and are trained every day to believe that we are rational and selfish bastards, are graduate economic students. They're the ones who keep most of the money, but even they keep—you know, they won't keep it all. They'll give something, because even they have other kind—I mean like every primate, they're not entirely engines of selfishness and greed. They are also human beings who recognise that they have to have some sort of modicum of decency with respect to another human being.

ET: Why do you think capitalism is so persistent?

RP: Oh, because it has guns. I mean that one of the ways that capitalism has tried to insert itself around the world is precisely through, you know, what Jared Diamond points to in terms of guns and germs, and both of these have been used as weapons, but I think that the interesting question is not why capitalism is persistent despite having awesome and fearsome weaponry but why it is that it hasn't succeeded. There are plenty of indigenous communities that are fighting back against capitalism still, 500 years on, 600 years on. There are plenty of communities within capitalism that reject it, and so you've got to wonder. Like here's a system of organising the world that has literally everything, and it's still not able to win, and I think that's a sign both, you know, of its frailty, like every system, and there's nothing total about capitalism, but it's also a sign of hope for those of us who think about well, what happens afterwards?

ET: So how is a non-capitalist future achieved, and what comes next?

RP: Here history doesn't give us much to hope for. I mean capitalism emerges because feudalism fell apart in a maelstrom of climate change and epidemic disease, and what do we have now? Well, we've certainly got climate change, and we also have, in concentrated animal feeding operations and, you know, these feed lots, the perfect incubators for epidemic disease around the world, so I mean if history is a guide, then capitalism ends in fire and disease, and that's not terribly optimistic, but looking at the patterns of history, that may be what it is that we have to expect. But that doesn't mean that we have to wait for that in order to imagine what it is that we want to happen next, and I think that these ideas of well, all right, what does enterprise look like, well, what does entrepreneurship look like when it's not capitalist, what is it that indigenous business, for example, you know, might be, what is it, and how is it that we can share and be connected to the planet in ways that are deeply respectful—I mean I think that there are a lot of ideas from First Nations who are both decolonizing the food system and decolonizing medicine, a range of other thing, that are worth looking at.

ET: Are you ultimately hopeful for our future?

RP: I mean, you know, it's the Gramsci line of pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will, but, you know, I can't look at how powerful these corporations are and think that they're going to just roll over and clear the way for, you know, a just economic settlement and, you know, end patriarchy and all the rest of it. On the other hand, I can't look at the social movements that have won victories already and betray them by saying well, you're pissing about on the edges because that's not true, either. So again, with open eyes of how difficult things are going to be and how difficult things are at the moment, I'm hopeful about what it is that we can achieve.

ET: Well, Raj Patel, thank you very much for coming in—

RP: Thank you so much, Edwina.

ET: —and having this talk today. Thanks.