

PJDS E06 Jendayi Serwah

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SPEAKERS

Adam Quarshie, Priyanka Raval, Jendayi Serwah, Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins, George Colwey

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 00:00
Is the Bristol cable

P Priyanka Raval 00:08
Isaac, you look sick as a dog. You're even sweatier than usual today.

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 00:11
Yeah, it's meant to be past my sweat season. I don't like that all our intros are on this.

P Priyanka Raval 00:17
Yeah, are you really sick? You look sick.

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 00:19
I'm quite sick. It won't go away. Death is coming.

P Priyanka Raval 00:24
And George is sick too. I feel thrilled to be locked in a windowless room with the both of you

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 00:31

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 00:31
The sacrifices we make for podcasting.

G George Colwey 00:33
We're sacrificing your health.

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 00:36
It's a sacrifice I'm willing to make.

P Priyanka Raval 00:38
So glad to hear that. I can't believe we've come to the end of our first season already.

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 00:45
I know, we've made it. They said it couldn't be done, but it's happened.

P Priyanka Raval 00:51
They said it wouldn't be listenable.

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 00:52
They said it wouldn't be listenable.

P Priyanka Raval 00:53
We didn't kill each other.

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 00:55
Yeah, that's, that's, that's a good start. Yeah, yeah, we can get there. Tell the cable this was great and watch it just send slowly. There is nothing better than a podcast where the hosts have fallen out.

P Priyanka Raval 01:05
I don't know many podcasts like that.

- I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 01:06
There was one. I can't even remember the name of it, but they were like a husband and wife, and they'd obviously split up, and then they'd had a whole intro once where they started trying to do it, by the way, we broke it, and then just started arguing, and then they never released an episode ever again.
- P Priyanka Raval 01:19
Oh my god, that's so dramatic.
- I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 01:20
That's great podcasting.
- G George Colwey 01:21
Was it Mr and Mrs Raval?
- I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 01:24
It was not that, no, but, uh, you know, we're getting there. We're building to it. It's fine,
- P Priyanka Raval 01:29
Building to a big bust up.
- I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 01:30
Hell yeah.
- P Priyanka Raval 01:31
Stay tuned for season two.
- I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 01:32
Subscribe to the cable. Watch it descend.

P

Priyanka Raval 01:35

Watch me and Isaac fall out.

I

Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 01:36

Let me rot it from the inside.

o

01:41

Security, I've always supported trans rights to fairness and equality. You are a liar. Just selfish, self centered violence. You are a liar. I was not suggesting they had the right to cut off water or friends. You're a liar. I've been an environmentalist all my life. Liar. Well, you can't grow concrete. You can see you. Cameron cheerio, I don't think I ever want to talk to any of those people.

I

Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 02:11

This is people just do something from the Bristol cable. It's a podcast about people on the front line of political movements where we attempt to sort of expand the definition of what an activist is. With me is Priyanka Raval and I'm Isaac Kneebone Hopkins. Episodes come out every Friday, although this will be the last episode of the season, so don't wait around two weeks on Friday whining like a sad dog at your podcast provider because it's not coming. So we'll be back in November, and if you love it, do something about it and subscribe on Spotify or any other podcast app. I have tell your mates, give it a five star review, but also join the Bristol cable. We are a member led and supported and created organization. You can do that at the Bristol.cable.org, forward slash join, and if you join because of the podcast, tell them about it, so they know how great we were and that they should keep us on for 10 more seasons until me and Priy aren't on speaking terms.

P

Priyanka Raval 03:10

So today, we were speaking to Jendayi Serwah, who is a lifelong reparations campaigner from Bristol, now living in Ghana. She was saying and very envious of the fact that she doesn't have to spend the winter here she was talking about the reparations movement, and what that actually means that is a very complex campaign, which is looking at, especially in the African context, what repairing the injustice that was done to Africa over the years, from transatlantic slavery to colonialism to neo colonialism, and how that repair would look like addressing the cognitive injustice. So what it did to people's mindsets and psychologies and the knowledge that was removed and eradicated and the cultural erasure, looking at the environmental disaster that came from it and continues to this day, and also the economic injustice. This was a super interesting interview looking at the organizations and the campaigns that she's involved in in Bristol, relative successes and the progress of it, some of the challenges of organizing as well and going through institutions, and maybe like just the extent of the work and the understanding that still needs to be done. So let's get into it. Jendayi Serwah, thank you so much for joining us today. You're a reparations activist. You're a consultant for the Black

South West Network, the Vice Chair of the Stop The Maangamizi campaign, co founder of the John Lynch Afrikan education program, Trustee of the Bristol Legacy Foundation, convener of Afrikan ConneXions Consortium, also a presenter on the Glocal Ujima radio show. Do you have time to eat and sleep?

J Jendayi Serwah 04:57

Oh, yes, and I like sleeping. Actually, yes,

P Priyanka Raval 05:02

it's fair to say you're, you're doing a lot,

J Jendayi Serwah 05:06

Not more, than our ancestors did, to bring us to this place and point in time. So all praises to them. We're just continuing a path that they have began to carve out for us.

P Priyanka Raval 05:20

And all those things have in common, campaigning for reparations for people who don't know who are listening to this thinking, what is that? How would you describe it?

J Jendayi Serwah 05:33

Well, firstly, reparations is a legal term rooted in the word repair. Repair is about righting wrongs and repairing damage. And in terms of international law, it's about a right to a remedy for individuals, communities or nations that have suffered gross violations. And this international law came about in 2005 through the UN and they have five principles associated with the right to a remedy. And people often talk about compensation as a synonymous term with reparations, but compensation is just one of the five principles, because not all types of harm are economically accessible, and some things are priceless. You cannot put a value on the life of my ancestors and my people. So when we talk about those five principles, we're talking about restitution, which is about putting back things to the way they were before the harms and violations took place. There's also rehabilitation, which can be psychological, to be spiritual, can be medical. So rehabilitation links very well to restitution in terms of bringing back balance, bringing back harmony, bringing back a state of consciousness, bringing back ways of doing and ways of knowing that have been disrupted, distorted, destroyed as a result of the gross violations. And for us, the gross violations are in three phases. They are chattel enslavement, colonialism and neocolonialism, which we refer to collectively as the maangamizi, which we also describe as the African holocaust. So we have restitution as a first principle, rehabilitation is the second, compensation is the third, satisfaction is the fourth, and satisfaction is about those who have been affected by this harm and the legacies of this harm being assured by their own metrics and measures of success as to the extent to which the remedies of works and the repair has taken place holistically, and so the last one, and some

would argue, the most important principle the fifth one, is guarantees of non repetition. So what measures are in place to ensure that these gross violations never happen again? So there's a need in terms of African reparations, because not all reparatory justice cases are the same. There is a need in terms of guarantees of non repetition, for communities to be able to protect themselves, be able to feed themselves, be able to heal themselves and other things within all areas of people activity. So as well as those five principles under international law, we also as part of the repair process, retrieve our own language and retrieve a power to define and the power to conceptualize repair. And so the Pan Afrikan Reparations Coalition in Europe and the Stop the Maangamizi we charge genocide Ecocide campaign have developed the concept of planet repairs. And so this conceptualization of repair speaks into reparatory justice, but also the nexus between reparatory justice, environmental justice, and cognitive justice, because there is not necessarily recognized within the five principles that when those principles were developed in 2005 we are almost 20 years on from that, and we are in the middle of a climate and ecological emergency, those things are linked to the damage meted out on African heritage people and other people of the global south and global majority communities that impact on our ability to repair and so the cognitive justice aspect is about a part of restitution that speaks to restoring and utilizing our ways of knowing, our knowledge, our ways of being and having an equitable place in terms of the knowledge that we produce and the way that we do things, as an antidote to Eurocentrism, which seems to be the norm in terms of how people think and define things and do things. So cognitive justice is very much part of the repair process. So that whole thing of planet repairs is those three things, reparatory justice, cognitive justice and environmental justice,

P

Priyanka Raval 10:40

When the UN resolution came about, did it have a specific context in mind? Was it responding to something?

J

Jendayi Serwah 10:49

That I actually don't know, but you know, in earlier times, we also had, in the 1940s this definition of genocide that was coined by Raphael Lemkin, and that definition of genocide is very important when we consider the harm meted out against African people through the Maangamizi because genocide is not a singular event where there are mass killings of people. Genocide also speaks into an need to find it in terms of patterns in time, in terms of how you remove children and stop that group reproducing themselves. And there are other dynamics within that whole thing around genocide and ethnocide as well, in terms of, you know, the killing of one's cultural pattern, which leaps in, also into ontology, in our ways of doing stuff. So, you know, all these things help us to understand what has happened to us, the level of damage and loss, and therefore what is in need of repair. So when we understand that, we know that a civil rights agenda and equalities agenda is insufficient to deal with African reparatory justice concerns and needs...

P

Priyanka Raval 12:14

Because it doesn't understand the full scale of the harm is that what you're saying?

J Jendayi Serwah 12:21

It won't address it. It won't because, because the whole equalities agenda is a civil agenda relating to a people as citizens or residents in a particular place at that time.

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 12:37

So it's like equality in the system, but the system as it is now.

J Jendayi Serwah 12:41

Yeah, what we have lost is beyond an equalities agenda, you know, we're talking about loss of land, desecration of land. We're talking about loss of language, loss of identity, loss of name, loss of culture. An equalities agenda will only deal with getting people, for example, more women or Black people, into positions of power. So it's a very descriptive representation thing. It's a very statistical representation thing, and relates to the inequalities within that particular society at that time. So it's not going to address the collective needs of a people dispersed and destroyed as a result of the maangamizi, which is why we need to have a fuller and deeper understanding of the level of harm, and that an EDI agenda will not be sufficient to address.

P Priyanka Raval 13:34

You know, when I first interviewed you in 2020 and wrote a piece about reparations, it was just after the murder of George Floyd. It was after we'd seen Black Lives Matter protests in Bristol, the Colston statue had been toppled, and I think on the seventh of July, Cleo Lake had bought a reparations motion to the council. And it was that how I learned about the reparations movement and what a complex and interesting and holistic demand it was. And I think the thing that struck me, and the thing that we spoke about then as well, is that Black Lives Matter, gets a lot of attention and a lot of sway, and people can buy into it very easily. But reparations, which is a really wholesale understanding of the harm and the repair and its demands, are so radical in a way, but like, somehow not getting the traction, like we can get on board with racial justice, it seems that got mainstream. And like you said there was a lot of representation politics, a lot of diversity schemes that sprung out of that, that a lot of equality, diversity, inclusion agendas, but reparations wasn't getting much of a look in.

J Jendayi Serwah 14:48

So there's a couple of things there. First of all, what we're doing is not radical. It's normal for people who have been harmed, who have been attacked, systematically over centuries, to seek redress so there's nothing radical about that. The Atonement and reparations motion passed in March 2021, in Bristol is something that has its roots in the Stop the Maangamizi, We Charge Genocide Ecocide campaign, who wrote the original motions that were passed in Islington and Lambeth in 2020, and then later in Bristol. And Cleo Lake, was a councilor the Green Party who, alongside Afrikan ConneXions Consortium and the mayor and Deputy Mayor of Bristol, Marvin Rees Asher Craig, we wrote alongside the stop the Maangamizi campaign, the Bristol narrative,

the Bristol context, in the revision of that motion that was then passed on the second of March 1981 which incidentally, is a Black people's day of action coming out of the New Cross fire in London that year.

P Priyanka Raval 16:02

Yeah, I mean, sorry when I say radical. I mean, I think it's radical to our society, but you're right that this is something which is a very well established and quite well and common-sensical if you really think about it.

J Jendayi Serwah 16:14

And this is why we have to seize the power to define and utilize our own language when we are labeled, because I'm personally labeled a radical quite a lot of the time.

P Priyanka Raval 16:24

You don't like it, as a label?

J Jendayi Serwah 16:26

It is like... is not something. It's just like, well, what is it that people are hearing or witnessing or experiencing that makes them feel that this is radical and why is not considered to be normal reaction to stuff. I think that's the question that people need to ask themselves.

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 16:44

Because I guess something gets defined as radical, and the suggestion there is therefore it's not achievable, right? Like sometimes radical seems to out there...

J Jendayi Serwah 16:53

Yeah, something that's potentially harmful to the status quo. Yes.

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 17:02

While we were talking about sort of just definitions, you mentioned pan Africanism at the beginning, and I was wondering if you kind of could define what you mean by that, just sort of like people know where we're coming from.

J Jendayi Serwah 17:11

Pan Africanism is an ideology, and it's a movement that is committed to the total liberation of Africa, is committed to the total repair of Africa, which includes the removal of colonial borders. It includes the removal of neocolonial puppet leaders in Africa. It includes the restoration of African sovereignty to African people in our own interest, economically, politically, culturally, socially, and so, you know, the roots of Pan African there are several roots. And there are some African leaders in our history, His Imperial Majesty, Kwame Nkrumah, and others who were committed to those ideas, and others that weren't. And there were several Pan African conferences that were held in relation to that particular intention which we have yet to realize, and pan Africanism recognizes the fact that we as African people exist all over the world. We are there through historical experiences, some of us because of the transatlantic trafficking of enslaved Africans, some of us, through other migrations, have populated other parts of the world. So Pan Africanism also includes Africans like myself, who are born away from home, who live in the diaspora, and those African descendants that have formed communities in what is commonly known as the Americas, the indigenous people called Abya Yala and other places in the world.

P

Priyanka Raval 18:49

Do you think that people have well, maybe what's harder to imagine is like, how like, what would that look like? If you're talking about these three things, so like, economic justice, like so much of capitalism is built on the exploitation of the global south and extracting resources, if you're talking about cognitive injustice again, there's a knock on effect of capitalism on people's mental health, because of institutional racism, the Western centric, Eurocentric way in which we operate, and then the extent of climate damage. It's how would we do it? We want to do it, but what does it even look like?

J

Jendayi Serwah 19:32

Well, what people need to realize is that there are pockets of activism, there are pockets of progress, because they're not the dominant thing that kind of has the visibility the propaganda is not as powerful as those who promote various aspects of global white hegemony. So there are people who live under different economic systems other than capitalism, there are people that are resisting capitalism, I know are educating people about the harms of that particular economic system. In terms of Africa, we need to know and understand that Africa as a continent, existed longer without those boundaries, those colonial boundaries imposed in the Berlin Conference in 1884 and so we need to think about these things as being possible, because actually they existed longer than the current phase of neocolonialism that we live in. Most African countries in their current identity are less than 70 years old. My parents are older than those boundaries when these people claimed flag independence, starting with Kwame Nkrumah in 1957 we need to not think about these things as not being possible, because actually, they're not that long ago. When we talk about the timeline of African people's existence on the planet and this period of colonialism and Neo colonialism, and talking about a mere 500 years, it's not a long time in the scheme of things. So the challenge is for us to then find out what it is we knew, what it is we did, how we were, the things that worked for us before the Maangamizi.

I

Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 21:32

Are there any countries that are a good example to look to that have done a better approach to the project reparations, like is there anywhere that people look to for examples?

J Jendayi Serwah 21:44

When we talk about countries, there's two things. We can talk about governments and we can talk about grassroots movements. And it's the grassroots movements that I think I would want to focus on, because if we look at the successive governments where we are in the UK, there's an extent to which they represent people effectively. So we cannot rely just because you may have a head of state that looks like me, has brown skin, does not necessarily mean that they have our interests at heart. And this goes, you know, whether it's Africa or the Caribbean, we've had various campaigns over the years in different places in America, there's been NCobra, the National Coalition of Blacks in America, and here we in the UK, we have the Stop the Maangamizi campaign. We have The Global African Congress as another body that's concerned with African reparatory justice, and there have been key figures even in the UK, like Bernie Grant, who tabled an early day motion in 1993 in Parliament and started the African reparations movement in that year. There are different ways that people are resisting and building knowledge around history and building capacity to challenge what is happening to them, but for in a way, their own safety. We won't be going too much into that today, but let's just say in Abya Yala, the Caribbean, South America. There are movements in Asia, there are movements in Africa, there are movements. And when these movements are ready to reveal themselves, to the extent that we have a better sense of the visibility and the connection around the continent, then we can talk about that some more.

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 23:43

So I went to Cuba in May for like Mayday, and one of the things there like part of the project of that government is that they are it's about economic justice, right to housing and food, and a place where like religions of African origins are kept on an equal footing to what was traditional Catholicism there. And like, wouldn't frame itself as reparations, would frame itself as socialist, right? And I guess, like, yeah, how do you it was somewhere that had obviously been severely affected by the history of colonialism and the slave trade as well. Like, yeah, I guess something like that. And then compared to somewhere like Jamaica, which, like, with the way, Jamaica, which like with the way the PMP was forced out by Western forces.

J Jendayi Serwah 24:25

Well, this is it, because the example that you cite are of regimes or ideologies that are anti capitalist, leaning towards socialism, leaning towards, I suppose more African centered ways. We would call it communalism. And so those things propose a threat to people who want to remain rich, who have a vested interest in maintaining capitalist systems. And so you see, there's a difference. Difference between how a country organizes itself ideologically. So Cuba is an interesting example, because it's a more people centered regime when you talk about the socialist thing. So countries like that may be more inclined, I think, to be responsive to the people and their needs at that level, but to say that that country has a particular commitment to African reparatory justice, I'm not able to comment on that.

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 25:39

We'll be back after this short break,

A Adam Quarshie 25:46

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I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 26:29

So you sort of mentioned these sort of grassroots groups, and you know, in your introduction, we had a sort of long list of these sort of organizations you're in. So I was, I was wondering if you could kind of talk a bit about what your work looks like in the UK and through those groups, these different strands of reparations.

P Priyanka Raval 26:47

And also, I guess that are they doing both? Because you said about change happening through the grassroots. But it also seems like you know you're involved in writing motions in councils as well. So is it like a two pronged approach?

J Jendayi Serwah 26:57

So yeah, we're working with institutions to get them to a point where they can engage with us, understand that we are determining our own remedies, and it's their role to support their role is to really follow our lead, because, you know, we are the ones that are impacted by this, and organizations and institutions tend to say, well, we're going to do this, and we only have this, and this is it's not even about consultation with African heritage communities. It's about us leading and them assisting us, restituting our resources so that we can determine what we do with stuff that belong to us in the first place. I think institutions haven't got their heads around that, and they just think they're going to do this, this and this, and also are kind of in this kind of thinking around EDI, and that is pretty much their MO in terms of how they think about solutions. We're not realizing that if the people who are harmed have their solutions and know what our needs are, as a result of that,

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 28:11

That is sort of it links back to what we were talking about in the previous episodes, where the Avon and Somerset Police has gone, well, we're institutionally racist. We've admitted that. But then when they were doing things like stop and search, they're like, we're not we're not going to change doing that's what we do.

P

Priyanka Raval 28:25

That reminds me what you were saying in the beginning about how in the international law that satisfaction is a part of it as well, right? So it's like, it has to be the community at the heart who is satisfied with the progress and like, stop and search and institutional racism. And I'm thinking about, you know, earlier this year, it was in the news that the Church of England were hoping to create a fund of a billion pounds to address the legacy of slavery. And I think that's happening slowly. You know, you hear like, oh, this celebrity realized he's got links his family have links to slave trade, so they're gonna try and pay reparations. Or, how do you see these movements? Are you like, oh, well, it's something. Or are you like, no, just, you just tackling one bit of the problem.

J

Jendayi Serwah 29:10

We need to move beyond this mentality of it's a start, okay? Because a lot of these individuals are not relinquishing power. They're not relinquishing resources. They are not recognizing their role as descendants of perpetrators and potentially complicit in continuing that harm, and still want to maintain that position of defining what it is that our people need and what should be done. Professor Kehinde Andrews talks about the psychosis of whiteness that is a symptom of that we're not at the stage yet where institutions are. Are operating in the best way possible. But we have people like Sister Esther Jose, who is part of the church commission group, for example, who is doing work through the Maangamizi Educational Trust to change mindsets. And we can't just be focused Isaac on these different institutional harms that keep perpetuating and living in hope that they are going to change. The police will always be the police and continue to do what they need to do. We, as African heritage people, need to concentrate on how we need to organize ourselves in the light of that, because there are limited changes that institutions will be prepared to make, but there are bigger goals that we have outside of those civil agendas, as I said earlier, that African heritage people need to come to terms with, because part of what we do as a survival mechanism, I think is to concentrate on things that give us quick wins and a sense of inclusion actually into a system that continues to mete out harm against us.

P

Priyanka Raval 31:11

But so what do you think then, of initiatives like what the Guardian are doing, because the Scot trusts, who own the Guardian say that they're going to invest 10 million pounds and then embark on a 10 year long program of restorative justice, working with descendant communities who are affected. Is it worth doing?

J

Jendayi Serwah 31:35

Again. Who has the power to decide what that looks like. It's a similar thing with the University of Bristol and their Reparative Futures Program. Actually, what they've done in the name of our ancestors is an extension of an EDI program. It's an extension of what they're doing in terms of race equality. It isn't really about African reparatory justice. So we need to be careful about how we use the experiences of our ancestors and doing things in their name is their name,

because African reparations has a spiritual dimension to it. This word is sacred to us. So it's not that it's worth doing. It's about how are you doing this? You say you're going to do this. When did we tell you that that's what we wanted you to do? When did we tell you that, if you you know, if you can show me a process where you're relinquishing your power, you're having conversations with grassroots campaigners that are directing the business of your institution or your corporation, your organization, then we can say, Yes, this is more akin to a model of voluntary reparations. That is something we can work with if you going to continue to have that paternalistic approach and ways of doing things with our communities, which is, you know better, and this is what we're going to do for you. And we're actually not going to listen to you, because it's our money. We decide it's our resources. You're not in the room, you're outside. We make the decisions, no that will not work.

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 33:20

Part of what you're saying is it is, like, the expansion of the use of, like, democracy in institutions related to things that impact these communities. And then, like, I guess, like, structurally, is that kind of maintained by like, grant funding for NGOs, where some of this work takes place, but then grants are always given where they will give you this money, but you have to do it the way we should do it.

J Jendayi Serwah 33:45

It's conditional, very conditional, and this is why grants funding and loans, it is not something that will work in an African reparatory justice model of doing things. And these are conversations that we've been having in the Bristol Legacy Foundation as well, and with Afrikan ConneXions Consortium, which is why we talk about the MET the Maangamizi Educational Trust, are working on a model of voluntary reparations. With organizations we in African ConneXions Consortium are advocating a model of restituted resources. So it's not about it's not even compensation, because compensation is about recognizing the harm and putting some economic value on it. We are saying you have stuff that belongs to us. You need to give it back so we can carry on our business and do our repair work on ourselves. You can't then expect me and us and our communities to be saying to you once a quarter, how are you doing with this? What your targets and what you know, your event No, your evaluation Network? That's not going to work. That is not going to work. So we have to be looking at different models, which is why that is going to require system change and mindset change.

P Priyanka Raval 35:14

Do you think the reparations campaign has made progress? I think in Bristol, you know, obviously all the examples of organizations that you're a part of and all the work that you've done show that there is a strong movement here. But you know, then I'm also thinking about the constant struggle for Black led, African led community spaces in the city to get funding and to stay afloat. So Are we making progress? Do you think in the city?

J Jendayi Serwah 35:43

So everything that happens in the city that has a Black face on it that has Black leadership

So everything that happens in the city that has a Black face on it, that has Black leadership, that has Black agendas, is not necessarily reparatory. Let's just make that clear. Okay, so we can't measure progress by things that are not within an African reparatory justice framework, but there are valuable services out there doing valuable work, but let's not conflate that with the African reparatory justice agenda. There has been progress. There has been a downside to that progress as well. So within the Stop the Maangamizi campaign, we have been calling for this all party parliamentary commission of inquiry of the truth and repair of justice, parts of the vehicle, um stepping stone towards that we had hoped would be our involvement in the all party parliamentary group on African reparations, of which the Stop the Maangamizi campaign, its educational arm, the Maangamizi Educational Trust is part of the Secretariat for that. But, um, you know, we're dealing with a big beast within parliament. So what we're finding now is that there are lots of people coming forward to say, Oh, my family have been beneficiaries unjustly through this history, they form themselves into heirs of slavery, and there's other things, like the repair campaign, but what they then do is begin to direct the narrative, and what they tend to do is ignore the movements, the grassroots, that have been operating decades under their noses in the UK and been looking to governments, particularly in the Caribbean, for their need, because we all know that there is a CARICOM Caribbean Community 10 point reparations plan, which has been problematic in many ways, it doesn't necessarily speak to the needs of people from outside of the Caribbean who no longer reside there, is not specifically speaking to the African heritage experience, because it also includes other the indigenous people of those islands also, and it's very government directed that there is a distinct lack of grassroots involvement in those things. So those structures have established themselves, whether it's a repair campaign and so on and so forth, and are having these conversations over our heads, and so we continue, to a large extent, to be overlooked. But why there is so much traction is because of the work that we have done as grassroots campaigners over the last couple of decades that have brought reparations to a point where the word is quite mainstream. Now, that wasn't the case 10 years ago. You know, we're still battling with misunderstanding about what it is, because reparations does not equal compensation, and that's the popular narrative in the media, which is also a big beast that we in the grassroots with the resources that we have have to contend with. So the all party parliamentary group on African reparations had its first conference in 2023 in October. Is due to have another one this October, 2024 but a lot has changed in that what we call the Appgar, A, P, P, G, A R, it's now seemed to be not so much taking its lead from the grassroots campaign as it was working with but looking towards CARICOM and other government structures in terms of how they might address repair, if indeed that's what they're doing, because there are also conflations between development as a thing that governments do and reparatory justice. And so governments need to not conflate and use the whole reparatory justice argument as a way of just getting resources into government coffers, which appears to be the direction of travel.

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 39:53

You've mentioned a couple of some sort of the decades of history of this movement. And like usually at the beginning, we ask, how do people get into it? But actually, in this case, I think it was really helpful for us to kind of lay down the terms because I think they're not something that everyone necessarily, they'll have heard the words, but not necessarily the definition. Because, as you say, there's this kind of institutional capture that kind of makes the definitions what, what the institutions want this to be. But what was your history of what got you into this sort of work, as opposed to potentially the more mainstream kind of like EDI, stuff like, why? How did you get involved in grassroots operation movement?

J

Jendayi Serwah 40:30

Well before there was EDI, there, the movement has always existed, because from the time of the capture of our ancestors, there was resistance on the continent, in the ocean and on the plantations. Let's just be clear about that. So there's a long history, and there are writings of some of the more popular people that are elevated in our history, like Olaudah Equiano, and we have things like Amistad and all those kind of things that point to that resistance story. Right? My personal journey begins with my childhood and growing up in the 70s, being really influenced and socialized by reggae music and the messages of that time around so called Black people's experiences in the Caribbean, in Africa, and this whole resurgence of racial pride through the Rastafari movement. So, you know, these things kind of open your eyes to what...

P

Priyanka Raval 41:35

This was in Bristol you were growing up?

J

Jendayi Serwah 41:38

Oh, absolutely, absolutely, in Bristol, just like many people of that generation, born in the 60s, born in Mortimer house in Clifton and lived in Montpelier. For me, Richmond Road was the first six months of my life, then moving to Eastville, which is where I am now, in my parents' home, and growing up here in a non Christian household meant I had exposure to reggae music, which, in Christian terms, back then, was considered to be the devil's music. So there was a lot of people who were not able to listen to reggae music in their homes. That sense of consciousness that was imbued in me led me into identifying with the Rastafari movement for a while. Led to me through my involvement the Mill Youth Center as a young person, and then a youth worker, establishing programs for our young people around culture and history, development knowledge, so establishing a joint African education program in 1990 myself and a colleague running history African worldview, 36 week course for 10 years between 1994 and 2004 so you know, there was a lot of identification, of need, of knowledge, of self in our community, to be proud, to be identifying with Africa. And then those things develop. So you have cultural education, you have historical education, all those types of things. And then, you know, there was a period in in Bristol and in the UK where there was a push towards kind of economic power within that, okay, so, you know, knowledge of self, but economically, we are still disenfranchised, but all those things we're still grappling with. And then this kind of developed into us organizing around a reparatory justice agenda when we came into contact with people like Esther Stanford, Jose, as she was known then she's now Esther Jose and Kofi Mawuli Klu and other people in London who would be close to Bernie Grant as Kofi Klu was back in the 90s that would then lead us to be organized in an understanding that it's not just about knowledge deficit and redress, but there's a whole host of things that we have lost as a result of this History and the current manifestations of this history. So that kind of led me to be involved in structures like the interim at National African people's parliament, as well as founding things like the John Lynch African education program in Bristol, and later on, when we had Marvin Rees come into power in 2016 establish establishing the Afrikan ConneXions Consortium, which sought to establish substantive representation in Bristol, which elevates African heritage voices in city affairs. So it wasn't just about we need to be at the table. We need to be establishing our own table. We need to be influencing our own those tables, not

from a perspective of inclusion, but this is how we as African people do things, and this is how we should be reflected in city affairs. It's not just a question of we need to be around the table. To contribute to how you manifest your Eurocentrism,

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 45:04

Just to explain, because you've mentioned Bernie Grant a couple of times, and people don't know who he is, so Bernie Grant was one of the first black MPs in the UK, at the same time as Diane Abbott in the Labor Party. Yes, just because he's had a couple of name checks and he's definitely worth people looking into.

P Priyanka Raval 45:19

I had a question about the challenges of trying to build a groundswell, especially in Bristol, and whether you think that reparations, the demands, the asks, the whole holistic system of thought, is it resonating with young people?

J Jendayi Serwah 45:37

The young people are very important, and some of them get it. We as campaigners need to do more to be working with and conscientizing our young people, because they're growing up in a different era to what we grew up in. And for them, the only sense of, if you like, mass organizing and protests that they have is BLM, Black Lives Matter, which is not the beginning of the story, is not remotely consequential when it comes to African reparatory justice, either. So we are doing the work with the resources that we have. This is why we need our resources restituted to us so we can continue to invest in our young people and bring them forward into the work that we're doing. Because one of the things that we're seeking to establish in Bristol as part of the community self repair process is the establishment of Zenzele village as a Land and Legacy initiative, an intergenerational initiative for African heritage communities committed to self repair and national self determination as a model of non territorial autonomy on an institutional level, so that we can begin to heal ourselves and look after and control ourselves in all areas of people activity in a safe space within this society. So Zenzele village is an aspiration for us. It needs our skills and our talents of our young people, as well as the wisdom of our elders and everything in between. It's an entirely possible initiative, even though it may seem fantastic and far fetched. There are other models that exist outside of the UK that we can look to in establishing Zenzele Village. And yeah, young people are going to be key within that.

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 47:39

So, yeah, we always ask this question of everyone, and it's, yeah, what is the one thing people can just do on hearing this? What can they go out and get stuck in with?

J Jendayi Serwah 47:52

Well, we we need support. We need skills and talents and support around the development of

well, we we need support. we need skills and talents and support around the development of Zenzele Village so they can go to accglocal.org and contact us, or contact us on ACXconsortium@gmail.com so we can begin to do some work with them, and that includes those who are consider themselves not of African heritage, who may want to support this initiative, the Stop the Maangamizi campaign still requires signatures on the petition, on change.org so that's another thing people can do. They can sign that petition. So yeah, those are the two things I would suggest, contact African ConneXions Consortium and get involved in pursuing African reparatory justice as a contribution to a bigger picture of African reparatory justice beyond the UK.

P Priyanka Raval 48:52
Thank you so much.

J Jendayi Serwah 48:54
Thank you.

P Priyanka Raval 49:01
I thought that was fantastic interview.

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 49:03
Yeah, no, it was. It was really interesting. I think, like, the kind of the focus on, like, both the need for resources and space for any political organization or any political movement, I think, is key. But the thing that was really interesting is that talk on, like, the way that these systems of oppression have an impact on people's minds and their consciousness and that sort of thing.

P Priyanka Raval 49:24
And systems of knowledge, culture and...

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 49:27
Like building cultures that are in opposition to what exists, I think, is it's something that's often missed, like it can so often be, how many doors did you knock? How many flyers Did you hand out? How many people ticked your boxes, signed your petitions, or whatever?

P Priyanka Raval 49:40
I think the thing that really stood out to me is this separation between civil rights and popular, let's say racial justice movements currently with reparatory justice, which is a much more kind of wholesale approach. And I think, Maybe being what she was, what she was trying to say, and

or wholesale approach. And I think, maybe being what she was, what she was trying to say, and what really interested me when I first wrote about this in 2020, is like the fact that BLM became mainstream is cause for suspicion. It's easier to adopt because it's actually not as radical like the hashtag reparations for the African continent is never going to be trending like BLM will, right? It's too complex. It demands too much of a systemic overhaul to get traction. But maybe for that exact reason, that is the thing that is necessary, like, therein lies real change.

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 50:36

Well, yeah, I think because we are doing with sort of, you know, having this conversation in the context of the most recent Tory government, had one of the most diverse governments we've ever had. I don't think anyone would say that was good for minorities in the UK. And actually, the call of Black Lives Matter to defund the police. If you want to ask who in British politics took money from the police the most, it was Theresa May who was also responsible for the hostile environment, like the tensions of these kind of single issue, not systemic views of politics and how they can be co-opted. I think is, is really interesting. I think that that chat kind of it drew that out. And I think that's something that people can really learn from.

P Priyanka Raval 51:13

Your challenge was interesting. And, you know, it's what we've been arguing about on and off air. Just saying, why we chat about falling out. So it might be weird for listeners, but, you know, but he's a fair enough challenge. I guess what you were saying about, like, well, that socialism, you know, if you're talking about climate justice, evil of the capitalist system, isn't that just socialism? Why not just back that? It's not sure. I'm convinced by but it's an interesting challenge.

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 51:42

We sort of spoke about this before we recorded coming from Wales whether, I mean, there's always a fight, and I think that it's wrong to call Wales a colony, which is what Adam Price was, the previous leader of flight company did. But Wales is a place where there has been a fight for culture and language and a concerted effort that was actually completely accepted by mainstream politics. There's Welsh schools, Welsh language has to be everywhere, that sort of thing. But like that wasn't always progressive. Some of the groups involved in that were, I'd say, unsavory. That's sort of my worry of removing it from the larger context of all encompassing system change.

P Priyanka Raval 52:18

But I don't think they need to be no antithetical to each other, right?

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 52:22

And I don't think they were in the chat...

P

Priyanka Raval 52:23

Yeah, no, but I think it is a conversation that I think we have in the left a lot of like, if someone starts talking about racism or culture, like anything which tends towards, like, cultural problems or specific racial identities, and they're like, we're going to lose the emphasis on material analysis and the redistribution of wealth. And, you know, we'll all get siloed into our individual, self centered, you know, etc, etc, whereas I'm like, No, I think there is something really valid about wanting to or just feeling like pissed off and hard done by the fact that your way of being in the world is so Western, Eurocentric and that we are really divorced from being able to have these kind of conversations in our own terms, in our own languages, with our own systems of knowledge, in communal ways and ethics, which are natural to our culture, which we could bring to a lot of these movements, but because they're not even recognized, like people aren't even aware that they're being ignored.

I

Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 53:20

Yes I know. I think I do agree. I do agree with this. Like, boring. No, I think, like, I guess for me it would be and maybe this is cynical, or maybe this is Eurocentric. But like, I think that any thing that brings you to the conclusion that we need to have more community spaces, people organizing for themselves. That is something to be celebrated, right? Like, you know that some of the writing I've done for the cable on the the kind of attacks on black community centers by the Council and the ways that the funding is always very conditional. I said, yeah, if you're not doing it the way we say you should, then it's wrong. And so I, as much as I have, my way of viewing the world, which that's the only white person involved in this podcast, I feel very uncomfortable about laying out, but like I hope people understand it charitably, because that is how I mean and that I it's not an attempt to attack or do down these different approaches, because I think that they do bring people to the same conclusion that the system we have is wrong. People can't come together. People's communities and histories are being flattened by a kind of global capitalism that finds any difference and inefficiency until it can make money off it, and that maybe things should exist outside of people being able to make money off them. And things can exist because they are something that brings us joy and enriches our lives. And I think that is something that's positive and beautiful. I think, see, I'm talking a lot, but what am I saying? But they're words. They're good words. They're all good words.

P

Priyanka Raval 54:54

We're being much more charitable to each other now than we all are fair, which is nice, and I think. We've We've reached a kind of a consensus, somewhat of a consensus. The whole point of this podcast is about looking at the something that people do and we might not agree with it, or, you know, it could be complex. Some approaches are more effective than others. How are we even measuring what's effective and what's not? Like those are all the kind of really interesting conversations that are always going to come around, any discussion of activism, organizing, community work, etc. And this one, I think, was especially interesting in terms of the power you build up in the grassroots, versus how much you engage with institutions, versus how much you should just ignore institutions because they're sort of structurally fucked and are never going to give enough of a leeway for you to implement any kind of change to then, how much you trying to bend the ear of power? How much of that is futile? Yeah, I just thought it

was a really interesting meandering through all the kind of themes that this podcast is looking to explore really. You have been listening to People Just Do Something. We were with Jendayi Serwah reparations campaigner today, I have been Priyanka Raval, and I'm joined by Isaac niepo and Hopkins. If you like the show, please give us some money to keep it alive. Go to the Bristol cable.org, forward slash join. And if you chuck us a tenner or a month, or give 120 pounds per year, that will give you early access to the podcast and get you a copy of the Bristol cable delivered to your home.

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 56:32

So you can be annoyed about me about three days earlier than the general population.

P Priyanka Raval 56:37

And you need that kind of window. Yeah. And if you have any comments or questions, send it to content at the bristolcable.org we want to shout out our first fan, Connor and to Wilfy D for our theme tune. This has been produced by the Bristol cable and our ill grotty producer George Colwey.

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 56:57

Cough for the microphone, George,

P Priyanka Raval 56:58

thanks for listening.

I Isaac Kneebone-Hopkins 57:00

Bye. You.