

EPISODE 4 - Collectively Imagining Our Futures

CONTENT WARNING

Before this podcast begins, we wanted to give you a gentle warning - this podcast can be a hard listen at times and includes themes and discussions of trauma, racism, colonisation and more. It's something you might need to consider before listening.

INTRODUCTION

EA: Whilst storytelling can help us understand others and ourselves, we often have to navigate myths and memories that hold conflicts or truths overtaken by others. BUT...for many understanding their past, their families, their roots - it can be the one thing that brings real connection to ourselves and those around us.

In late 2022, Scottish-Zimbabwean artist and researcher Natasha Themviso Ruwona programmed an event titled *Our Stories Between the Myths and Memories* in partnership with The Skinny. Hosted at David Livingstone Birthplace in Blantyre, Natasha brought together a wealth of creative practitioners from the Scottish African diaspora to celebrate their contributions to the creative sector.

Natasha's aim was to let the project speak to past, present and potential futures that examine Black Scottish history, culture and identity. And why the location? Well, it placed a spotlight on the work that David Livingstone Birthplace are doing as they consider the role of museums within truthful storytelling.

My name is Eilidh Akilade, I am the intersections editor at The Skinny and over this 4-part podcast series brought to you by the magazine in partnership with We Are Here Scotland, you will experience some of the conversations, questions, creativity and reflections that came out of that weekend.

Welcome to Our Stories...

In this, our final episode of this series, I am going to look at how things will play out in the future. How we collectively imagine our futures was a big theme that rose to the surface during the weekend. Throughout, we looked at imagining otherwise through care and healing.

Part 1: Adebisola & Tomiwa

EA: If you've listened to episodes one and two, you will have heard some of Adebisola and Tomiwa's conversation already exploring chattel slavery, colonisation and indeed decolonisation, the difficulties associated with museums for many and more. How do we take work around this and the thoughts that accompany that forward into the future. And, crucially, what role does care take in this?

Let's hear from Tomiwa and visual artist Adebisola on some of these themes...

TOMIWA: *I was thinking about care and anti or decolonial work through care, through care or with care? And what does that look like? And is it possible?*

ADEBUSOLA: Right okay, so Christina Sharp, like, if you've never read the book *In the Wake on Blackness and Being* go and get it? It's really helpful to think about how to think otherwise. It's a good counter to reading a history book because it allows you to think otherwise to what your indoctrination or your conditioning is. So now that you know you're in white supremacy, now that you know that regardless of how you grew up, you're indoctrinated into its modes of thinking and you are, ah, part of its machinations, to keep itself part of that machination has been the obfuscation of reality. So you're not actually really perceiving reality in truth. And so therefore, how do you think through that obfuscation? And now you know where you are, how do you move through? She says something about an ethics of care, living as I have argued we do, um, in the wake of slavery, in spaces where we were never meant to survive or have been punished for surviving and for daring to claim or make spaces of something like freedom. We yet reimagine and transform spaces and practices of an ethics of care, as in repair, maintenance, attention, an ethics of seeing and of being in the wake as consciousness, as a way of remembering and observance that started with the door of no return, continued in the hold of the ship and on the shore. And I think that for me, it's that ethics of care that's important, because we are not practiced in having an ethics of care towards Blackness. Antiblackness is a global force and is a global practice that nearly every single culture in the world practices and tries to benefit from. It's the way the world has been constituted up until now, it's our current world order. As she says. It's the weather. Antiblackness is the pervasive weather that we're in it's pervasive and it's insidious. And so seeing as nobody knows what an ethics of care towards blackness is, how do you practice that? How do you learn that we have an ethics of care towards whiteness? That's the default? How do you think otherwise, and how do you imagine otherwise, and how do you bring attention and care and management to have an ethics of care towards blackness? And I try to for me, being able to see through the obfuscation of white supremacy is having an ethics of care to myself, is being able to know and remind myself that all right, that's what's happening around me. Um, that's why certain people are behaving the way that they're behaving. That's why that person is saying what they're saying. That's why certain things in the world happen the way that they are. That's why we will literally live and be against our own best interest in the service of capitalism and white supremacy. Because white supremacy requires you to sacrifice - it is a bit of a spiritual practice in a way. It requires you to sacrifice yourself to keep the system going. Doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter if you're white, you're Black, you're Asian, you're expected and you're indoctrinated into sacrificing yourself for the system. And even those who benefit from it don't really benefit from it. Reality, you're losing a part of yourself. And so that practice of care is in being able to know where you are, for a start, developing a way to think critically about where you are, what you're seeing and what you're hearing, and then to imagine otherwise, that in and of itself is care. And just for me, just doing that extremely difficult thing keeps my mental health in a specific place and the people that I surround myself with, as Mud Salter says, the project that we worked on, the personal is political, don't let anyone ever tell you otherwise. And if you try to, if you still don't understand that in this day, with everything that's going on in Britain that's been going on, you lived through Austerity, you lived through Margaret Thatcher, you left through Austerity, you left through Brexit, you're living through what's going on right now. If you still don't see that the personal is political and the political is personal, then I don't know what to tell you. It's in having that understanding. And I make sure that I surround myself with people with a certain kind of politics, a politics that isn't

dependent on the violent extraction of someone else's life, a politics that isn't dependent on the exploitation of someone else's life. That is important to me. That care, obviously. Reading slavery history, reading about colonisation, reading about white supremacy, reading about antiblackness is tough and it's destructive, um, because I'm always astounded at the levels of it, and particularly reading Scottish involvement, Scottish people had a reputation, and it can really mess with you at times. And so take regular breaks. Take regular breaks from it. I go months at a time where I'm not allowed to pick up a book, you know, um, about any of this stuff. And I stay off of social media. I stay off the news. I don't know what's happening in the world. I only know what's happening in my tiny village in Neilston or what's happening outside my window or I work in public health. So what's happening with COVID? Just taking things in bite-sized chunks. But the people that I surround myself with, the community that I surround myself with, is what keeps me going. That's pivotal. That's the thing that I've learned in the last ten years, is that it's your community that raises you. I know that statement generally applies to bringing up children, but it applies to all of us. It's your community. It's the people you surround yourself with that really raise you, that help you grow, that help you stay grounded, that help you stay sane. Those small things, but huge things like read, think critically, surround yourself with people who understand that the person who is political, understand your own politics, are from your politics. Have a political stance and follow it. You know, in every aspect of your life, at least try. We all need to start somewhere. You don't need to be like, you know, whatever. You don't necessarily need to be an activist. I'm not an activist. But you don't need to go. We all have our roles to play. And so, teach your children to be antiracist. Teach your friends to be anti-racist, because it's an active process. Everyone needs to do their bit. Um, and you can't just presume that because you're not shouting the "N word" all over the place, then that means that you're not racist. To be anti-racist is a practice, and you need to follow that through, and you need to ensure that everyone around you is doing it. Um, and you need to actually teach the next generation. You can't just presume that, like, oh, they're little kiddy winks, and so therefore, they're picking up the racism from you. So, yeah, all those things are an ethics of care towards Blackness.

Tomiwa: *Thank you very much. I'm just thinking I even wrote it down. To imagine otherwise is care, and I think that is definitely one of the many things I'm taking away from this conversation. But I think it's a really important point to think on and to consider and to come back to. And it was like a running theme in everything you said about imagining otherwise. Thinking critically, asking questions, what's missing, what's not being told.*

EA: Society needs to be confronted with what exists outside what can be a natural bias or even ignorance. That bias in terms of beliefs and what people naturally go along with is down to a number of things including discrimination. And I think thanks to the creatives on this podcast, they have helped highlight how much is still swept under the carpet, the barriers that are still raised, the "white" systems that prevail and the lack of learning that people have done.

Adebusola talks a lot of about the obscurities created by white supremacy and a point to highlight - "*How do you learn that we have an ethics of care towards whiteness? That's the default?*". If we go back through all of these episodes and take note: the discussions around slavery, the theft and violation of communities for artefacts for museums to house and present in a set way, the board and video games that Clementine presents and how they will

always work in favour of the system, the colonisation and myths told over centuries and the racism. It is all antiblackness.

So the crucial step now is to move towards a space of care. To educate, the nurture, to build our communities, to reclaim and to use the power of creativity and the stories it brings to imagine outside of the system that's in place. We must, as Adebunso says, develop a way to think critically - and that in itself is care.

And where does the future come into this? We pay it forward, we educate, we continue these conversations, we have uncomfortable discussions in safe spaces, we teach our children, we teach our friends. But as powerful as it is to feed up the chain, there is still arguably change to be made at the top. In our politics, in our organisations and indeed in our arts. Tokenism should now be replaced with active practice.

Part 2: layla-roxanne - Black Out Here

EA: I want to bring back in layla-roxanne hill who you met in our last episode, she co-authored Black Out Here: Black Lives in Scotland with Francesca Sobande. The rigorously researched book focuses on the history and contemporary lives of Black people in Scotland. What does it mean to be Black in Scotland today? How are notions of nationhood, Scottishness, and Britishness implicated in this? Why is it important to archive and understand Black Scottish history?

You're about to hear a reading by layla-roxanne from part of the book which explores racism in Scotland, continuing on from Adebunso, the conversation around antiblackness and the incredible research that layla-roxanne and Francesca did in modern Scotland.

layla-roxanne: *I feel like I'm tolerated, but only if I keep quiet and accept my circumstances. I was told by another teacher whose ethnicity is ambiguous but I can say is not white, that living in Scotland and being of colour means that I should just expect the fact that I would experience racist behaviours directly at me. I don't want this to be my life and choose not to accept this as the default - 27th October 2020 and that was by one of our interview candidates, um, between the ages of 26 and 35.*

Racism in Scotland exists. Specifically, such racism includes the persistence of antiblackness. Contrary to mainstream media, marketing and tourism mysteries that mobilize postracial perspectives, racism is not something that is just visible over there and elsewhere. It is here to it's here too, in Bonnie Scotland. The opening words of this chapter form a comment which was shared in response to our 2021 survey for Black people and Black lives in Scotland. As is illustrated throughout our book, such an experience of encountering anti-black racism and being expected to keep quiet and accept it, uh, sadly can be a common occurrence for Black people in Scotland. Hence, presenting Scotland as a supposedly post-racial utopia in comparison to England and other parts of the UK is inaccurate and dismisses the reality of racism experience here, in the words of Jonathan Wilson, a branding expert, public speaker and marketing scholar of Caribbean Scottish descent, who spoke to us about his experience of living in Scotland in the 1990s I love Scotland and I love the dream, the fantasy, the mythology associated with Scotland. But

along with awakening, I'm also acutely aware there was a lot of embarrassing past and history that's uncovered to me. We contend that Scotland is shaped by intersecting inequalities and a matrix of oppression related to racism, classism, ableism, sexism, misogyny, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia and many other interlocking forms of systemic harm and violence.

*Furthermore, extensive work highlights that Scotland is still distinctly impacted by disparities and deeply entrenched forms of discrimination, simply stating that structural racism in Scotland exists is far from being a radical act. However, efforts to meaningfully, record and respond to the realities of racism and racialised people here are often resisted by individuals and institutions that deny Scotland's colonial and racist legacy. In other words, acknowledging the existence of Scotland and racism without seeking substantive actions to address it is not revolutionary. Nevertheless, naming and examining racism in Scotland compose a potent threat to the palace full post-racial position that sometimes strategically projected onto the nation. Still, we recognise and affirm the words of scholar Katherine Ketrick, whose vital book *Dear Science and Other Stories* include discussion of the unsustainable nature of the logic of knowledge. To prove bear, we folk need just percentages when writing a book. We did not do so to prove the existence of anti-black racism, nor to prove the existence of Black people in Scotland. Instead, we wrote with an acute awareness and experience of anti-black racism and being black in Scotland. Therefore, perhaps unsurprisingly, we know the resemblance of research and writing that ponders whether antiblack racism and Black people are indeed present in Scotland. Spoiler alert. Both are.*

*Throughout history, Black people's face various iterations of a burden of proof, which is often buttressed by anti-black assumptions of the falseness of black people's claims and knowledge. Although some of what is articulated in our book can be interpreted as forms of proof for example, Black people's perspectives, our work was not written in response to an impulse to prove or persuade. Instead, *Black Oot Here: Black Lives in Scotland* was written from a place of pausing, processing, piecing together, and also peering back from Black living archives. This research and writing project for hours acknowledges the nuance and expansive nature of many aspects of the lives of Black people in, from and connected to Scotland. As such, our work is shaped by the poignant words of scholar and artist Deria Carter on Black study, who states that Blackness somehow remains both in and out of time, pushing against the attempts to be ordered in the present, revisiting and reimagining the past, uh, producing future possibilities. While writing the book, we thought that conversations and experiences that are seldom deemed to be forms of knowledge because they've not received an institutional deal of approval, or because they are current spheres that are not carried by territorialism of academia institutions seeking to be the authorities. On Black history and Black lives in Scotland when working in our book, we remain causing of the common ways that Black people's experiences of Scotland are merely reduced to conversations concerning race, racism and trauma without due attention being paid to different dimensions of what it can mean to be a Black person and from and connected to here. While the lives of many Black people in Scotland may be affected by antiblackness and interrelated forms of oppression, this does not exclusively define who such people are and how they experience the world. In writing here, *Black lives in Scotland*. We seek to reckon with the relentlessness of anti-black racism in Scotland while also reflecting on many other facets of Black people's lives which are rarely foregrounded in writing and research regarding Scotland, as well as writing and research related to Black lives and*

history in Britain. For example, we acknowledge some of the different perspectives of Black people in Scotland and push against the idea that all Black people in Scotland share the same political views, activist inclinations and social values. As part of such discussions, we consider how the material conditions of Black people in Scotland can drastically vary, influenced by the nexus of issues concerning race, class, migration and asylum-seeking, among other matters. In taking this approach, we draw feminist methodologies that are based on the idea that feminist research involves something more than adding women and stirring or simply controlling her gender by means of a single variable.

The many topics and issues covered in Black Oot Here: Black Lives in Scotland include the following how the histories and lives of Black people in from and connected to Scotland are shaped by both the specific nature of Scottish social-political settings and the relationship between Scotland and Britain. Including perceptions and experiences of the distinction between Scottishness, Englishness and Britishness how anti-black racism, Xenophobia and interconnected depression impact black people in Scotland and solidarity building the currents of contemporary political and public conversations concerning racism. Multiculturalism. Scottish independence. Black people and the notion of New Scots and Scotland the educational experiences of Black people in Scotland as both teachers and learners the development of Black activism in Scotland black people's experiences of engagement with the creative and cultural industries in Scotland and the COVID-19 pandemic experience of Black people in Scotland.

When choosing to include a survey as part of our approach to this research, we are mindful of the potential for such a research method to result in work that places a harmful emphasis on quantifying Black people's lives. We wanted to avoid reducing the rich words and perspectives shared by black people to dehumanising data points that make the fullness of who they are disappear.

Almost approximately 90% of people who responded to survey are currently based in Scotland and others who previously lived there or have an ancestral connection to it.

We share this information in the spirit of openness, but in doing so we also seek to say that this is not a book mainly based on statistics. Nor do we claim that the responses to our survey represents the views of all Black people. Instead, we view the value of the survey responses as being received in the vivid and detailed reflections that people shared and which should not be dismissed on the basis that fluctuate reflections cannot capture the experiences of all Black people in from and connected to Scotland.

EA: layla-roxanne and Francesca bring a number of discussion points into the present and consideration for the future. It's also continuing conversations, that like many of the subjects through this podcast, have been hidden from sight. This includes the painting of Scotland in a light that denies colonisation, racism and problematic behaviour.

This reading from layla-roxanne gives an insight into the book but highlights the research done to shine light onto the conversations that need to be had. The celebration of Black history and culture that is intrinsic to Scotland and should be educated on more widely. And

as was more recently said by the authors: "The fullness of Black Scottish history must be acknowledged and archived, and not just via a gawping white gaze."

Part 2: Inga Dale - Again

EA: We finish with Inga Dale who I introduced you to in episode 2 of this series. I wanted to end with her poem *Again*. She told us at the event it was written when she was looking at Black identity and doing research on civilisations.

The opening line is apt, I think, for this episode. It speaks to long, difficult journeys and the difficult reflections which come with them, as well as the power that surrounds so many people, communities, stories and achievements - in the past, present, and, crucially, the future.

Inga: *A long, long road, but look how far we've come. The dreams of our ancestors materialised in our realities now.*

Freedom, the choice to be realisation of our identity built on resilience, consistency, taking responsibility for our future because our history was disrupted. Shaped and explained through slavery and oppression but beyond that, on the ancient mysteries of humans, civilizations and settlements which flourish so don't be discouraged. Colonialism did not give us knowledge.

Before we were doctors, scientists, teachers, architects responsible for building Black empires. Not savages, lost tribes needing salvation and direction without interference, there would have been progression. Yes, we have a long way to go, but let's acknowledge how far we've come, overcoming stereotypes to be seen in a light that rightly represents us.

Breaking barriers of colourism, racism, patriarchy, misogyny but most particularly, the self-doubt to flourish in a system designed to keep us out.

We will stand tall. Tall, prevalent and powerful, like Victoria Falls. Taller than the statues reminding us of our Black history that shouldn't have been. Taller than any biases attached to the colour of our skin. Taller than any limitations we may feel within.

[OUTRO]

Thank you for listening to this podcast, please do take time to listen to the other episodes in this series and let us know your thoughts.

In the meantime, if you want to learn more about David Livingstone Birthplace and make up your own mind, they are located in Blantyre and we will provide more information in the show notes to accompany this episode.

CREDITS:

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