

# Moments of Solidarity Between People with Different Intersectional Struggles

## Part 1: Young, Diasporic, Mobile, and Queer

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Podcast Episode 1

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Shawn Mugisha	Uganda
Sofia	England, Germany
Fairy Gutz	Guinea, Spain
Akosua Twinwaah Amponsah	Germany, Ghana
Lineo	South Africa, Australia

Clementine: \*Humming and singing\*

So there you are, that was just to start you off. Don't say we don't put all our efforts and all our talent into reaching you on all levels.

Welcome. This podcast is about moments of solidarity between people with different intersectional struggles. You're going to be with me on this two-part podcast series recorded for the Hirschfeld-Eddie Stiftung. My name is Clementine Ewokolo Burnley, and I've been living in Europe since I left my home country, Cameroon, more than 30 years ago now.

In Europe, people consider the current moment of pandemic uncertainty of movement across borders or frustration with political leaderships or indeed an unpredictability in the economic markets, a new thing. But this is actually what many people outside Europe have been living for a long time. I certainly remember this when I was young, in my 20s and leaving home. I wondered how things are going in the places outside the mainstream. In the countries where COVID vaccines are yet to arrive. Who haven't had their first / second shots, and who are not waiting for their boosters. I wondered how activist's relationships are being lived out across the world.

Over a period of about a month I talked to six very different people. Estela, Lineo, Sofia, Akosua, Shawn. You are located quite far apart on the map. Your experiences encompass Algeria, Spain, Guinea, Uganda, South Africa, Ghana, Paris, and Berlin. You're all young. On many levels I think of you as movers and shakers. At the moment you do this moving and shaking mostly in a quiet way. I was thinking, well, I wouldn't find you on billboards in the capital cities of Europe. Well, we'll hear later on who you might find on a billboard Tokyo, but I find you even more interesting because of that. Because somehow, I have the feeling I hear the same stories.

Zoe Aishatu: I'm Zoe. I'm 22 years old. My mother is Cameroonian, and my father is German. I was born in Italy and raised there for half my life and now I'm living in Paris, studying fashion.

Shawn: I am Shawn Mugisha and I am part of the Young, Diasporic, Mobile and Queer Project. I am representing from Kampala, Uganda.

Sofia: My name is Sophia. I grew up in London. In the Borough of Hackney, in east London. And I now live in Germany. I've been living here for a number of years and I'm the third generation that is living in a place other than the place they grew up in. I can totally understand my siblings who continue to live where they grew up.

Fairy Gutz: OK, my name is Estela, AKA Fairy Gutz, AKA Starlight, AKA Astre. I'm a drag artist in Berlin, and a voguer and a dancer and a body movement teacher now? 'Cause I'm starting to do these workshops, which is really really exciting for me because for a while I've kind of been exploring how the body and movement can be used as storytelling within drag and within dance, for healing. So, now I'm getting to do that, full circle moment, but I just got started with that.

Akosua: My name is Akosua. I'm Ghanaian-German. Based in Germany, born in Germany, raised in Germany. Love to be always in Ghana. I'm 36 soon. I live in the diaspora, kind of, because my dad is from Ghana. I'm mobile because I have a German passport and I'm able-bodied. I'm queer, but not really visibly queer, so it's easy for me to travel most of the time. I'm light-skinned, that's also a reason why it's easier for me than for others to travel. I come from a poor family in Germany, so in Germany I'm working class, but I went to school. Soon I will have a master's degree.

Clementine: OK, so now if you like you can share a little bit. Yeah... Give me a random fact about yourselves.

Akosua: My favourite food is fufu<sup>1</sup> with light soup. Yeah... I think my father and my stepmom and my siblings, they prepare the best fufu. So I started to eat fufu when I was like, one year old? Yeah, that's when I started fufu, and since then I really like this food. Unfortunately, I can't prepare it on my own. And what changed since I was young... So, I grew up with so-called "boga"<sup>2</sup> fufu, so it's more like, not the original fufu from Ghana. It's like potato powder and starch and water that you pound together to get fufu. Since I travel a lot to Ghana, I prefer the original Ghanaian fufu.

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<sup>1</sup> A West-African dough-like food made from fresh or fermented cassava.

<sup>2</sup> Term used to describe people from Ghana who have migrated to other countries, mainly Europe and the United States.

Fairy Gutz: An oven baked rice with a lot of chicken. My grandma would mostly make this, but a lot of my aunties make it as well and my mom makes it all the time. It's like peanut sauce on the side and then the rice is oven baked with chicken, with plantains, with vegetables, everything. And it's like, really crispy but very flavourful and it's, oh my god! I melt every time I eat, it's incredible.

It was always like a treat, like, if you wanna make Estela happy, make this food. It was really fun to just hang around with them. When I was really young, they were like "No! Don't be here!" and then growing up it was like, every time I hang out around them, I'm like, "Teach me! I want that in my life, 24/7!" It's kind of been like a bonding thing 'cause now when I don't remember something I can call them and be like, "Oh, how did you used to make the sauce this consistency? Or creamier?" or whatever. And then we get to bond over that, over food. It's kind of like the food and the hair and the music that's kind of like the glue that's kept me together now that I'm older.

Sofia: So, I enjoy my crunch these days. What's very interesting is that since moving to Germany, since being abroad, since being away from the family that I grew up with, certain things have become more important than they were before. Couscous for example. Couscous was fine. Couscous was just there, you know. At weddings, every now and then my dad would cook couscous. And yeah, now, I'm like, "Ok, I gotta make some couscous." It's important. And it's important that it's right. I have to admit, when I'm feeling lazy, I do this thing that I learned in Germany with the couscous. You just put it in boiling water. Let it sit. Done! It's obviously meant to be steamed, moved with the hands, all the clumps taken out, buttered, steamed again. Do that a few times. If the sauce is underneath, then that gives the couscous also a nice taste in the steaming. But yes, that's not happening sometimes. I have allowed myself to be a bit lazy. But I do notice, the first time I saw someone doing that I just thought, "Uuh! How dare you make couscous this way! What is this?" And now I realise that I cheat too. I still enjoy the couscous. It gives me a feeling of home. Even though it wasn't my favourite dish, it's become something meaningful on that level. Maybe it always was but in the absence of other things, things like food become the creation of home, of roots. Yeah, so I can feel myself a bit rooted and connected to, not only my family or places, people, rituals that belong to me, but also to myself.

What disturbs me most about the world today is the pace. The pace. The pace of life. Getting up, getting breakfast

ready, getting out of the house by particular time. Certain countries, like the one I live in, have got school start at quarter to eight. At some point, I think in the last century, some people sat around said "Right, this is when the children go to school." I don't know what they were thinking! I'm gonna google that... Off to work, through the traffic. The pace of life. Definitely. The pace of life. The living costs. Living costs have increased, which I feel has increased the pace of life because generally, a lot more people have to work now more hours to cover basic costs. The pace of life. A world in which we go to time management workshops and we're really talking about how we can save time. How we can save time? This is what we're doing. How we can do things quicker. How we can be more effective with time. I don't want to be effective with time, in that way, that I get more done in a small amount of time. It's been more effective when I slowed down. I don't need to do everything.

They say that we do way more washing now than we did before we had washing machines. You know? We wear the T-Shirt once, goes in the washing machine. You know? Can't be having any of that bodily odour, people think. So we're spending now, I don't know how many more hours a week doing washing, even though we have the washing machine that has helped us to not have to do the washing. But with all the washing that we do, we say "Oh great! I've got a washing machine. I can just wash more often."

So, the pace of life is something that disturbs me about the world today. And there were for certain other times, where also the pace was fast. And I think now we live in particular times where it's become normalized. It's become absolutely normalized. I know the older generation, so my grandparent's generation, they sometimes look at our generation and say "Wow. Wow. These people are working. They got their day jobs. They come home; they do housework. They're looking after children, put the kids to bed. Cooking. Everything all at once. All at once, all at once. And obviously a lot of us want everything, so yes. I enjoyed and have enjoyed all the moments where I had just one appointment per day. I had the luxury, of taking it easy. Taking it slow. And it's not just holidays. So those days come sometimes, and they are delicious.

Clementine: So, you've been talking about capitalism, colonialism, industrialisation, and use of time. And one of the things that occurs to me is the stereotype or the meme about the African parent, or in general the immigrant parent, who really is all about the hard work, and all about the qualifications and the education and the getting ahead. Any stories for me?

Zoe Aishatu: When I was younger, I feel like had- I felt like so much I wasn't allowed to do. I felt like I had the strictest mom, which looking back in hindsight, was not the case. And now that I'm sitting here trying to think of things that were off limits, I'm struggling. However, I did really have the impression that even though there were rules of what we weren't allowed to do, I felt as though what my mom cared about the most is, for example, if we would do something that wasn't allowed and we would snitch on each other, as siblings, my mother would basically chastise the one person for doing it, and then chastise the other sibling even more for snitching.

Lineo: Yeah, see, I kind of respect that.

Zoe Aishatu: Right? And she was like, "You and your siblings have to stick together. You have to be a team." And stuff like that. So, I felt as though, if we were doing something we weren't supposed to do, but doing it as siblings, as a team, with my cousins, I have the feeling that- I don't know if this is true or not 'cause I never talked to my mom about this, but I felt like lowkey she was like-

Lineo: A little proud?

Zoe Aishatu: Yeah like, a little proud.

Lineo: She's like, "Alright."

Zoe Aishatu: She's like, "Aww they're bonding.".

Lineo: Like, "Good for 'em."

Zoe Aishatu: 'Cause I think she has a lot of memories with her siblings of them being like, up to no good. All together. Even if they would fight between themselves, towards the parents, towards authority figures, so they were a team.

Fairy Gutz: I mean whenever I talk to my Nigerian friends, we kind of have this thing in common. I think 'cause Nigerian Gina are next to each other. But there is the thing, where there's academic excellence. Like this push for academic excellence, like so hard. Like, you have to work so fucking hard because the people that came before you sacrificed a lot and personally growing up my mom would give me homework, for example. I would finish my school homework; she would give me extra! Yeah. If my homework was one hour, she added another. Yeah, yeah. It was intense.

Clementine: Because I find this interesting, how those things go together. The idea that, if you are not working so hard that you're visibly suffering then there's something wrong. At the same time, people use time and think about time in different ways, are thought of as lazy. What does that all have to do with anxiety about getting ahead, getting more, status, class and what might drive African parents? What might drive immigrant parents, who set such high standards for their children that it turns into a meme?

Fairy Gutz: There are so many people that are, for example, disabled or that are in a position where they're migrants and not by choice. Where they're refugees. Where they're being pushed out of the places where their family was born. People are going through a lot of emotional abuse, financial abuse, a lot of opportunities are just not there, and they need community care. Community care can be a group of friends that help each other when one doesn't have money for food but then to grow that into a larger organization. I don't know, to connect people. Even globally somehow, that are diasporic or that are just in a disadvantaged position. There are organizations that are genuinely helping people but it's not enough.

I haven't talked about my dad at all because I don't really have a relationship with him, but I feel like I should start with him. He's Spanish, but he's actually half Turkish. And there's like a weird thing in there where he knows he has to pretend to be Spanish to get more, but that makes him reject his background and I really don't vibe with that. But in a different way, he kind of like has a lot of Muslim friends, for example, from Morocco. Or, just like, is friends with quite a lot of diasporic people and I think that's where he like, gets his outlet. Out of the climbing ladder of white supremacy. He still lives in Spain.

And my mom, when she lived in Spain, it was kind of like, it was very hard for her to make friends because it's a very unforgiving place. Like, if you're black, it's kind of like, you're a service worker or a nurse and if you are anything but that, it's like people get pissed. They're really like, "Urgh!" They think you're taking the jobs that belong to them, the nice jobs, the ones where you're not breaking your back every day. Right? Yeah, it's fucked up. Yeah. In Germany too, I feel like.

But anyway so, my mom's friends, I remember her having this group of Filipina friends that taught her English and they were really cute. Yeah, they would cook together, and she had this rule that they should only speak English to her. And so that was cute. I think, I mean she made friends with a lot of Muslim-Spanish people as well because there is that diasporic group there that has always been there, but it's pretty much pushed to the side. Like Moroccan people or Turkish people. So, she had- her best friend is Moroccan right now. And we moved from place to place all the time so when we lived in Guinea, she had all of the Guinean friends which was really cool. And when we moved to the states, she had all the African American friends. I think we both were a little hoteppy<sup>3</sup> in that most of our friends were black but that's what felt good, and that's what felt liberating, coming from Spain. So, yeah. Those are the those are the friend groups for each one.

Clementine: I'm going to say three words and I want you to pick one. Fight. Flight. Freeze.

Fairy Gutz: Definitely. Like, we shouldn't have to make ourselves small in these situations. We should feel- we should be safe enough to fight because the thing about the fight response that makes it effective, is to have people around that care too. Because if you don't have people around that care, and you fight, the mob might get you. You know? You don't know where they're standing. If they're standing with the abuser and the predator, or if they're standing with you. So, yeah. It's really hard to access anger in moments where I've been sexually harassed 'cause it's more about, "OK who's gonna help around here? No one? OK. Let me find the best way to get out of here." And if that means to make myself small, and smile, and just kind of like inch away really slowly, and try to be nonthreatening, then it's what I'm gonna do. But it feels terrible, and disempowering.

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<sup>3</sup> Refers to Afrocentrism, an African American cultural and political movement that regards African or black culture as pre-eminent.



Shawn: Well, what disturbs me most about the world today, I think it's capitalism. It's made us, all of us, it's made us slaves. People are doing things they hate doing, people are living lives they don't like to live. It's really put us in the space where we have to... you know, to... to hustle to just survive.

And then also, another thing maybe could be how people don't mind their business. Like from a queer perspective, as a queer person, how is it someone's business that I'm queer and they need to make that a national legislation? They need to make it a national debate. They need to make my decisions, my being, like- what happened to people minding their own business?

And the change I would like to make in the world today is really... How do we make- like... Like, the work I'm doing, especially around the pharmacy, healing study. It's how do we create spaces where the basics are brought back. Things simple as respecting someone just because they're human beings and understanding that it's just... As much as they don't have maybe money or what, but they need the decency, the dignity of having good foods, not good food, proper food to eat. A proper roof over your head. Really the basics. The things that have been so much monetarised. Those less privileged to have these things, how do we create a society where we actually can thrive? That is how through community living we're trying to maybe work through these things. Like the space we have with someone who is less privileged to have such a space but also support them to get out of this space and have maybe a life for themselves? Like how do we support each other to become better beings really.

Fairy Gutz: Right!

Shawn: But with the food you buy today. You buy bananas by fingers<sup>4</sup> and usually these fingers are from different bunches of bananas because they're just put in the sack while they are transported to Kampala. So, it has a variety of tastes because of the different matoke<sup>5</sup>. And then also the cooking has changed. It's mostly, these days it's not mostly done in banana leaves because the banana leaves are sold, so it becomes kind of costly for someone to... It's a thing you

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<sup>4</sup> A bunch or hand of bananas.

<sup>5</sup> Plantain or cooking bananas.

have to buy every day. So, every day that you're going to cook, you need new bananas- banana leaves. So, what is done today, it's done in cavera<sup>6</sup>, or some type of sack that is synthetic. And this changes the taste really. It removes the natural taste that the banana leaves had. And then also the dangers that come with cooking food in plastic.

Ah today, everything has become sort of urbanized. The matoke is sold so that there's a thing of the matoke being harvested from one bunch. When one bunch is harvested, when its cooked, it has the same taste though and throughout.

Sofia: There's something very emancipating about the idea of even laws being homegrown. There's autonomy in there and there's... there's independence. There's a return to that which could have been. Let's put it like that. Before colonialism did a lot of things. Yes, and I think that search also for that which is one's own and the finding of that which is one's own. Yes, this is what I call queering... Oneself... Queering history... To arrive at that which is one's own is in this world the queerest thing one can do. In a world where everything has been ruled and formed and created through forces like colonialism and non-queer being which has done a lot of damage and created a lot of pain.

Akosua: I think for the last question I would answer, decolonize everything. I really would like that the whole world would decolonize everywhere in their specific ways. That includes also the African continent and I think by decolonizing Africa radically, that would also mean to think about queer-phobia on the continent and that would mean we have a lot of work. And we can't always just blame the white people, because this is also centring whiteness and I'm bored by that, so yeah... Let's stick our heads together and decolonize everything so that everybody can have a proper life.

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<sup>6</sup> Plastic film or container.