

Moments of Solidarity Between People with Different Intersectional Struggles

Part 2: Decolonise Everything

By Clementine Ewokolo Burnley

Podcast Episode 2

Hirschfeld-Eddy-Stiftung

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Akosua Twinwaah Amponsah	Germany, Ghana
Sofia	England, Germany
Fairy Gutz	Guinea, Spain
Lineo	South Africa, Australia
Zoe Aishatu	Cameroon, Germany, Italy

Clementine: Welcome. This podcast is about moments of solidarity between people with different intersectional struggles.

Humming and singing

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. This is the second episode of a series of two podcasts for the Hirschfeld-Eddie Stiftung.

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

Akosua: Hello everyone. My name is Akosua. I'm Ghanaian-German. Based in Germany, born in Germany, raised in Germany.

Sofia: My name is Sophia. I grew up in London. In the Borough of Hackney, in east London.

Zoe: 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.

Lineo: I'm Lineo. I'm South African. I'm 22. Oh- 21! I lived in South Africa most of my life, growing up at least, and I was in Australia briefly from the age of around 8 to 12. After that I spent a little bit of time in New York and now I live in Paris full time and I'm studying film.

Sofia: I'm the third generation that is living in a place other than the place they grew up in, and 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. I am 21 years old. My family's from everywhere but I would consider my roots to be Equatorial-Guinean and Spanish. I have- I've never lived in the same place for more than a year except for Berlin and Houston. But other than that, when I lived in Spain, it was very much going back and forth all the time and this has definitely affected my upbringing and my mindset, in that nothing is permanent. Right? And how all of those things relate to my queerness is pretty much the same. I am quite fluid. I use pronouns they / them. Sometimes I feel more feminine. Sometimes I feel more masculine. Sometimes I feel in-between.

Shawn: As activists, what held us together was this sense of community and belonging. We really watched out for each other. Were there for each other. Like, we just socially hung out. Like it was just "Oh you're queer. This is a safe space. Come, let's create safe spaces for ourselves." But after 2010... 2010 and onwards, I think. At the peak of the anti-homosexuality act and bill. At that time when it was just still a bill, I think that changed the community. The activists, I think, angle because that's the time we were really exposed to "Oh shit. There's actually funding for this work. There's money in this work. "

So, what- a community that used to be held together by, you know, its mission, like that safety of... together. Safety is in numbers. This is us. It changed to everybody now is in this because it's a money-making opportunity. And right now we have more organizations coming up every day. We have over 200 lead LGBTI organizations.

Clementine: Sometimes there's a roadblock. So, I'm curious... What uses up your energy and your time. What makes your complexity, complicated? More complicated than it needs to be. What do you say no to?

Shawn: There's a certain sort of standard with people that the society expects you, even when you've transitioned, to become a certain type of man. Like that kind of man, we've been socialized to know. You know? Like... like in our cultures men don't do certain things. Men, you know... so like me trying not to be that kind of man becomes kind of difficult in this society that has specific expectations of me. So that's why you find people who are now forced to start doing surgeries or start taking hormones. Just because we have this size to fit in, in society. Because of this kind of man that society expects me to be.

This in turn has also brought, within our LGBTI community, that patriarchy has been replicated within our communities. So, I think it's something that as communities and as individuals we need to start being cautious about because you find... some lesbian women who demand this kind of respect. "Oh, you should kneel for me. You should cook me food." And there's some of these things bring about gender-based violence in our relationships, or even in our community.

About colonialism, man... We're- we are in this in this place where we have laws in our country just because of colonialism. This is the root cause of all our problems

today. If there were no section 145 in our penal code act, I don't think issues of having sex against the order would actually be a thing in our society. And now it is something that we have adopted and its becoming difficult to go away from. Yeah... colonialism really fucked us over.

Zoe Aishatu: I think patriarchy effects my human rights in terms of my own body, like sexualizing women and consent. Because, being raised in this world where when it comes to sex it's all about, you know, male pleasure, what men want. Sex education was focused around male ejaculation. They didn't even bring up consent once. And everything you see in films. It's like sex is something that is done to women. It's all about the man and we're just kind of there to be a means for them to get off. Because of that, and because it's so ingrained in everyone minds, and it has been changing a bit lately, in the last couple of years, but it's still there, and that's how we grew up. And I think a lot of women or at least young girls, they don't realize that you don't have to be that. You're not there for male pleasure. And because of that, because it's so ingrained in our heads, we don't feel comfortable to fiercely say no we don't want to. You know what I mean? Or you feel guilt attached to it and that's like... that's my body. You know? It's my right to say no.

Fairy Gutz: So, I did have to be in a lot of situations where I was the only black person in the room. Like in school there were no black kids and there was a time period where I spent all my time in my dad's house and my dad's family is white. Right, and it is- there are sometimes where you feel so invisible just because in general white people just don't- I don't even know what goes on up there but sometimes it's like they really don't see us. It's like an invisibility blanket like in Harry Potter. So, when you have those experiences of not being seen or heard you want to seek out someone that sees you and hears you. I think that's what both of my parents were doing and seeing them do that made me do the same thing myself. I think that's how it's affected me positively 'cause now I have all types of friends and they really take care of me and we're really there for each other. If there's like a fucked-up situation, we're always the ones that look at each other across the room like, "Do you see that?!". You know, like the things that sometimes, or most of the times, white supremacy doesn't allow white people to see because they're just not raised to pay attention to microaggressions and ignorance and so many of these other things.

Yeah.

Clementine: *Humming and singing*

Fairy Gutz: I work so hard, and I still have money issues, just because there are so many moments in my life where like, I have just had this door close in front of my face as I'm about to step in. Like as an example I could use my university. I was working on my thesis, and they deducted 48 points without telling me why.

And yeah, and I remember- because in the thesis you had to do an oral part and then you had the written part, and they do the oral before they read your whatever. I remember talking about my topic which was emotional synesthesia which is some- Basically it's people that- Oh my God. It's a neurological thing where people can hear colours or smell sounds and the nerves are just- not the nerves- but like the cortex is all connected, whatever. I was talking about that and how that relates to graphic design and colour theory and music theory and music therapy and all these things, and...

Clementine: *Humming and singing*

Fairy Gutz: I was talking, and these two examiners were old white German men, and they were looking at me with so much hatred that I was like, "Holy...".

Clementine: *Humming and singing*

Fairy Gutz: There's something. You know like, when I give the presentation, they talked and then they had to have a 5-minute discussion of the grade I would get. This discussion lasted 30 minutes. I was like, "Did they forget to call me back? What's going on?". And then I started going about my day then they called me. When they told me my grade there was this weird smirk of like, "Let's see how far I can go with this. I know I'm in control here and I'm gonna see how far I can push it."

And I think the reason why I gave up fighting that, 'cause I was ready to sue them. I was just sending emails back and forth with so many people and all these other things. I was like, the more I fight, the more they- it's like what you said. They enjoy it so they want more. The more I fuel the fire, the more disrespectful they're gonna get. The more unjust they're gonna get, and...

Clementine: *Humming and singing*

Shawn:

I think people would stick together without funds, than they are today because this has happened in the past before we got funding as a community. When we were just still organizing on a more social level, like watching out for each other. You know? Who has been thrown out by the family? Who can host this person? So, in the past we were more of a real community, the real meaning of community. Being there for each other, and this has been taken away from us because of money. People have drained activism because they feel it's a quicker way out of poverty. People have joined activism because they feel it's a quicker way to getting employed. So, it has removed the activism in it and just left a shell of NGO's, CSO's just running around because there's funding. That's why I find us... -and it's hurting as a community that we don't have agenda because of such... really, money issues because... -and also, you find there is HIV programming today, tomorrow is the health programming. We don't really have an agenda. The agenda is where the money is, is where we'll go. So, I strongly, strongly still believe we would really be sticking together much more if there was no money. Yet we need the money. Interesting..

Fairy Gutz:

I think the main thing that influences these relationships are kind of a combination of deep empathy and love because especially in activism groups you can get some people that are virtue signallers¹ and they just, you know, they just wanna climb an invisible ladder, to just have clout, or who even knows. But what keeps these collectives and places is strong, are the people that have a deep empathy for each other and that can really see through all the bullshit. And at the same time, it's so easy because when you have a genuine connection and genuine love you just feel it. And I think that love is what keeps everybody together. Especially 'cause whoever identifies as an activist, is literally like- they are so busy and so tortured. You know? That they need genuine relationships and when love's involved, I feel like these groups, they just thrive. They just help each other. They give each other skills. They just push each other up and that comes from friendship, I feel like.

¹ "Virtue signalling" is an attempt to show other people that you are a good person. The expression is often used to imply that the virtue being signalled is exaggerated or insincere.

You wanna be with people that you feel safe with. That you feel like, if someone grabs your hair at the club, they're gonna scream at this person. You know? They're not gonna be like, "Oh maybe your hair is just so beautiful!". You know?

I remember in Spain I was the only black kid the whole time except for once, and this kid only lasted a year until he was pushed out. And it was really sad because he was the only person that defended me from bullying which definitely played a part. Yeah, like they were like, "Oh he's violent. He's screams. This is not the standard that this school needs." or whatever. You know how they talk: the word soup, the bullshit. Yeah, so they kicked him out. And school just reminds me of the carceral system so much because they're still targeting- or like the police. Like the teachers are the police, literally. Like, "Do what we want! Otherwise... You know, we're gonna ruin your life. We're going to give you a criminal record of being kicked out of schools and then the next schools will judge you and then..." You know, the domino effect of policing. Yeah...

Sofia:

If nationhood is a search or a discourse or a narrative of belonging, then queerness is being. I feel queerness is something very true to the self. It's very true to the self, so sometimes it feels very much like a connection to that which I was before I learned how somebody with my body should be walking in this world.

The thing that I see influences the relationships among activists and the groups that I've been involved in, is what this activism means to the individual person. How strong is the identification of this activist? How co-dependent is one with activity, with activism, with the problem at hand, the topic at hand? It doesn't matter. That's the point. That's the point...

You know we grew up in societies where we're told to do everything in a straight line. One has to be at school same time every day. One has to do exactly what is put in front of you. One has to do this one, one has to do that. One has to stick to rules, conventions. The conventions of particular cultures. So to queer that app, to feel time, to take time and perhaps even slow things down.

"Entschleunigung" in German. This is a power that we have. This is a power that we have. To feel time as something powerful. To feel that we are allowed to experience time. That we will experience time in the way that we experience time and in the way that we feel fit to experience time.

Continuity is a luxury, sometimes. Some of us are used moving but we used to tend to move in groups. Some communities still do this and sometimes in some communities, for example some of my ancestry. They would move all together as a group and the home would even move with them. But in our diasporic movements we tend not to bring our homes anymore. So I've in recent times become more attached to thinking of objects as continuity where there has been, let me call it rupture, over many generations. Not only moving from country to country but also because of war and upheaval. Having to move or being moved forcefully within one place, even within that place one has called home. Yes, within that I found that objects, whether it's a book or whether it's a key for a home or whether it's... anything really. A small flower that somebody gave me that's important to me, they move around with me. This of course means that I'm not being very Zen sometimes, and I wonder what minimalism would say about this. But I certainly love the idea of taking one's home with me. Taking my home with me. That there's at least the home as a continuity. Yes, so the idea of living in a mobile home and being able to move with your people. Ah, it feels quite delicious.

Fairy Gutz: I had this guitar in middle school, and I would love to play, like I was in the guitar club or whatever. And I would play at night, and it just calmed me down. It felt like meditation, kind of. When I had to move to the States, I had to get rid of it for some reason, we were just moving too many things. And I went to my friend's house, and I knocked, and I knocked, and she wasn't there so I was like, "OK bet!" and I left the guitar in front of her doorstep. Later when she got home it wasn't there anymore and I was like, "God damn it! That was for you!" And I wish I had that guitar. It was really cute, it was like red and stuff, but I have another guitar now, so...

Zoe Aishatu: I would like to have my Tamagotchi, 'cause that was the coolest.

Lineo: Yeah, they were cute yeah... I remember.

Zoe Aishatu: These little Japanese toys. You needed to look after them and you played games with them

Lineo: They died and everything. It was a whole emotional ordeal it was like having a real pet.

Zoe Aishatu: Yeah! I never managed to keep mine alive for long. My sister was better at it, but they would grow and at one point they got so old that they died and-

Lineo: Yeah! Yeah! They had full life spans! I remember it used to horrify me. My cousins Tamagotchi died and I remember I was like, "I don't ever-" I emotionally invested in hers and I was like, "I don't want one. I don't want anything that dies."

Zoe Aishatu: Maybe it taught us responsibility.

Lineo: I guess...

Zoe Aishatu: Now you can buy them on Amazon for like 50 euro.

Lineo: My mom used to do this thing where she- like every other year or so she'd just take all my stuff and give it away. She did the same thing with her stuff. It was everyone's stuff had to go but I remember feeling so like, cheated sometimes 'cause I would just be midway through. I was still in the phase to be enjoying those things-

Zoe Aishatu: Yeah! Before you've gotten bored of them.

Lineo: Genuinely! I would be nowhere near bored. I'd be reading a book; she sees the book holder in the like- what do you call that? The thing? Like the bookmark inside the book and she pulls it out and she's like she's like, "Do you think your cousins would like this?" I'm like, "Bro, are you sick?" like, "Is everything OK?"

Zoe Aishatu: But- I remember my mum used to do that too but that was more so like as a punishment 'cause I'd like been up to no good. Or because my- I think my parents really didn't want us to be spoiled.

Lineo: Yeah. My parents had that too.

Zoe Aishatu: Like to humble us.

Lineo: But that's the thing!

Zoe Aishatu: They'd give it to you for Christmas and strip it away from you by summer.

Lineo: No! Summer? March! Like, I'm like- are you?! This is- I haven't had even the time to contextualise what this thing means to me. I haven't built any memories, it's gone! Like,

I don't know. It was just like, I think sometimes it was like a question of like, you know... I don't know if my parents ever threatened to take things away 'cause of behaviour, but I did feel a lack of control over it because there was no like, warning about it. The things would just go.

Zoe Aishatu: Yeah. Yeah...

Lineo: Also, I don't know. I didn't really outwardly react. I'd always be like, "OK..." and I like- after years and years I think I built up a resentment instead of actually just healthily being like, "Actually no. Don't take this thing."

Zoe Aishatu: Yeah. But is there one specific thing that- or... Can you think of anything that was taken away that upset you?

Lineo: I can't remember a lot of my toys. I think that makes me upset. I used to love some of my stuffed animals and stuff, and they were just gone. And the only stuffed animal I have, is the one that my grandmother had when she was sick and like she had cancer. And then my mom gave it to me, and I was like, "I don't know if I want this..."

Zoe Aishatu: Aww 'cause it might be ripped away you mean?

Lineo: That, but like, also it's like all the toys that I had that had no emotional baggage, that were just toys, were then taken away. The last thing I had was the memory of like, my grandmother who's dead. Which is like, fine... But like, I don't think I deal with things well if they're constantly in my face.

Zoe Aishatu: Oh OK. So it's like a reminder and it just kind of...

Lineo: Yeah. It would really mess with me. I couldn't sleep for a couple of days. I turned the stuffed animal around and would put pillows in a corner of the room around it.

Zoe Aishatu: Oh no!

Lineo: It was just a lot. So that- I don't know if I want- actually I'm lying. I do want some of those animals back 'cause I don't also have any vestiges of my childhood. There's nothing I can say like, "Oh when I was a kid I used to use." None of its with me.

Populism disturbs me most in the world today and I think the changes that would have to be made would be like, fundamental, constitutional changes. I think especially like, I see populism sort of is... It's interesting because I think it's like the one through line that I see between like, part of the world I grew up in other- like, developing countries and here in Europe. There's this will to like, instrumentalize the working class and their desperation. And then like, turn that into a way to just and make whatever you want to happen politically possible. Like I think especially in South Africa, it's something we're really working through right now. Like it's... There's this whole generation of people that have watched- like it's this really sad reverse Christmas morning type situation. Or it's like, we've went with the hope of the ANC being the one party that got elected the first and then now it's the only one that's been in power for like... Should be like 30 years by now. In 2024 it will be 30 years. Which is insane. I think South Africa had a lot of hope in the beginning and I think it's the case for a lot of other places. Like I know people from South America where it's kind of like the same thing. It starts that way and then suddenly you're in a dictatorship. Like, I don't know what to call South Africa right now. Like, it certainly doesn't feel like it's a democracy. But I think because of populism, it mobilizes like a lot of other things to be possible 'cause once you can appease that class of people who wanna make themselves oligarchs and sort of like, untouchable, they can just make whatever possible and then you see people's rights getting rolled back. Healthcare, rights to abortion, rights to like education. I feel like honestly for me it goes in like- it's so bad to think so cynically but I see that road in the future, and it scares me. Especially for South Africans. Like, I think it's just like... I don't know, it's a little nerve wracking to be honest but, yeah...

Sofia: If nationhood is a search or a discourse or a narrative of belonging then queerness is being. I feel queerness is something very true to the self... It's very true to the self. So, sometimes it feels very much like a connection to that which I was before I learned how somebody with my body should be walking in this world.

Fairy Gutz: Zoomers are so smart. I love them! I love- I love teenagers. It's, like "Whoa!"

There's this manifesto called "The Gender Accelerationist Manifesto" and basically what it says is that you can identify as anything. You can identify as a kitchen rag if

you want to because gender is not real. Right? And it was so funny 'cause I found that through like a discord of like gamer kids that were like mad young. Like, there were older people there, but it was the kids that shared that and I was like, "Wow! That's so cool." Like..

Clementine: Thank you so much. I've enjoyed listening to you Lineo, Fairy Gutz, Zoe, Sofia, Shawn, Akosua. It's been a real pleasure.

Well, you heard it here first. Decolonise everything. Kill the bill. Break gender.

That's all. Thank you for being with us and take care out there.

Humming and singing