



**KIN**

**RUNNYMEDE**

# Convening 2019

August 2020



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# Introduction and background

KIN was founded in 2017 by a group of activists and organisers from the UK and US who were inspired by the radical potential of trans-national spaces for black people to come together. The belief that strong community, physical space and meaningful relationships can lead to powerful actions and sustainable change has pushed KIN forward ever since. They have run a number of events with black activists from across the UK, including the inaugural KIN Convening of 2018 at the black Cultural Archives in Brixton, South London.

KIN organisers identified a lack of joined-up strategic thinking and conversation about black organising in both countries, as well as an absence of intergenerational work in black communities or deep reflection on shared history.

They believe that there is currently a lack of mainstream analysis and political discourse around how racism manifests and impacts people in the UK, from social institutions such as education and the media, to obfuscation and erasure of Britain's colonial legacy and history of global racial oppression. Consequently, there is a lack of mobilisation around issues that disproportionately impact black people – understood here as those of African descent who are racialised as black.

KIN aims to offer a space for black activists and organisers to explore the history of local and global social movements, to sharpen their organising practice and to contextualise what achieving collective liberation looks like both within the UK and beyond. The 2019 convening, KIN's first international convening, widens the context from the UK context to the African continent and diaspora.

## What is the KIN convening?

The inaugural KIN convening in 2018 was a gathering where participants came together to build meaningful relationships, explore organising practice across a breadth of contexts and strategise on how to co-create a community that supports local and national organising.

Over three days, 50 participants came together to be facilitators, conveners and participants. These were not mutually exclusive positions. Individuals ran workshops, two running concurrently, which were attended by the other participants. The trainers would then become participants, attending and contributing in the other sessions. Four facilitators from the KIN team were present to manage logistics and 'hold the space', encouraging positive communication between participants.

A report that drew out the themes, commonalities and disagreements that occurred during the convening was published in February 2019.<sup>1</sup> Amongst its recommendations it suggested that:

- Another convening should be organised and, dependent on resources, intermittent meet-ups to maintain relationships and momentum.
- The next convening should include time to share strategies on organising practice and see where collaboration could happen.
- The next convening should widen the network to include more diversity of thought, with more facilitators to manage potential conflicts and look for common goals.

The need to widen the scope to include experiences outside of the British context was also raised during the initial convening.

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<sup>1</sup> Kimberly McIntosh (2019). *KIN convening 2018*, <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/KIN-REPORT-FEB-19-DIGITAL.pdf>

In response, KIN held its second convening in October 2019. This convening was open to activists from across the African continent and diaspora. Offering a space for reflection on how activists organise at the intersections of blackness, within and across borders, this convening brought participants together to learn about the fight for justice in other contexts, both what is shared and where difference lies.

At last year's convening, recognising and uniting the diversity within blackness emerged as a key theme. The challenges facing black activists and the mechanisms through which they fight for justice will differ from one context to the next. This convening aimed to widen the net, whilst honing on four main issues that impact black people worldwide. The areas chosen were:

- migration
- incarceration
- the rise of the far right
- climate justice

In discussing these issues through workshops and talks the participants considered: what is common in our struggle but not our strategy? How are we coping in an increasingly, openly fascist world?

As well as a rigorous space for interrogation on what participants are doing, how they are doing it and what solidarity across these diverse movements could look like, the convening was also an opportunity for each participant to reflect on their work, meet others working on similar issues and share moments of joy with black organisers from different parts of the globe.

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## Methodology

The purpose of this report is to assess to what extent the convening achieved its objectives from the perspective of the participants. To evaluate the potential impact of the convening, it was decided that the most appropriate methodology would be 'participant observations'. In the previous report, the report author was the primary evaluator. This time, the approach has been amended to instead centre the reflections of the participants, where possible. Over the three-day convening, the primary author observed half of the workshops on each day for context and to pull out emerging themes. She has added context to each section based on her observations of what was discussed and arranged them thematically.

However, to ensure that the experiences of participants are centred in the analysis, 1-2 participants were assigned to write up their interpretation of as many sessions as possible. Some of the contributions have been edited for clarity and consistency (e.g. British English).

They were instructed to note any conflicts, consensus and tensions as well as how the session would (or would not) influence their own work. This is in line with the recommendation from the previous year's report to "see where collaboration could happen".

Not all of the participants assigned to sessions were able to complete their reflections. As this report will outline, barriers to participation and access to resources continue to restrict black people across the diaspora.



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# KIN convening: Values and objectives

The convening was organised to achieve a number of objectives and facilitated to maintain adherence to certain values and behaviours.

## KIN values

- **Love and compassion.** Treat participants with patience, compassion and empathy. Acknowledge that people come with difficult experiences, and discussion topics can be tough and emotive.
- **Accountability, honesty, trust and transparency.** Participants will be honest about what they can offer, but also what they may need to hand over. Challenges will occur, but push back against different views with respect.
- **Queer affirming and challenging 'gendered' behaviour.** Behaviour is learnt through culture, history and socialisation. Acknowledging this, participants will work to challenge damaging behavioural trends that replicate patriarchal structures which are oppressive to women, queer, trans and intersex people and people of marginalised genders and gender identities.
- **Solidarity, community, unity and inclusivity.** Extending the values of compassion and empathy, participants recognise that the struggles we face in our respective contexts whether that be in their day-to-day lives or the political landscapes they reside in; we will constantly seek to understand and celebrate our differences, but also work to visualise and bring clarity to how we are the same and how our struggles are intertwined. Participants will seek to be inclusive of all folk and be critical of how exclude e.g. the language we are

using or the way we conduct our meetings.

- **Joyfulness.** Activism is hard work and it's important to rest and have fun. Participants will seek to bring joy into the space. They will support and uplift each other.
- **Vision.** Participants will regularly check in and revisit the vision to ensure they are moving towards the objectives.

## KIN objectives

- Share organising practice. How can activists collaborate strategically to avoid silos and build on past and present practice?
- Build meaningful relationships. Participants will meet others who work on related issues and use those relationships to strengthen their work.
- Provide a learning space. The environment will breed openness to listening and learning from conflict.
- Uniting diversity within blackness. Although many participants will share some life experiences, there will be differences. The convening will aim to unite around common goals.
- Build community and ourselves. The convening will provide space to build a community of black activists and equally to nourish individuals who may be carrying out draining and difficult work.

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# Embodying KIN values - the opening session

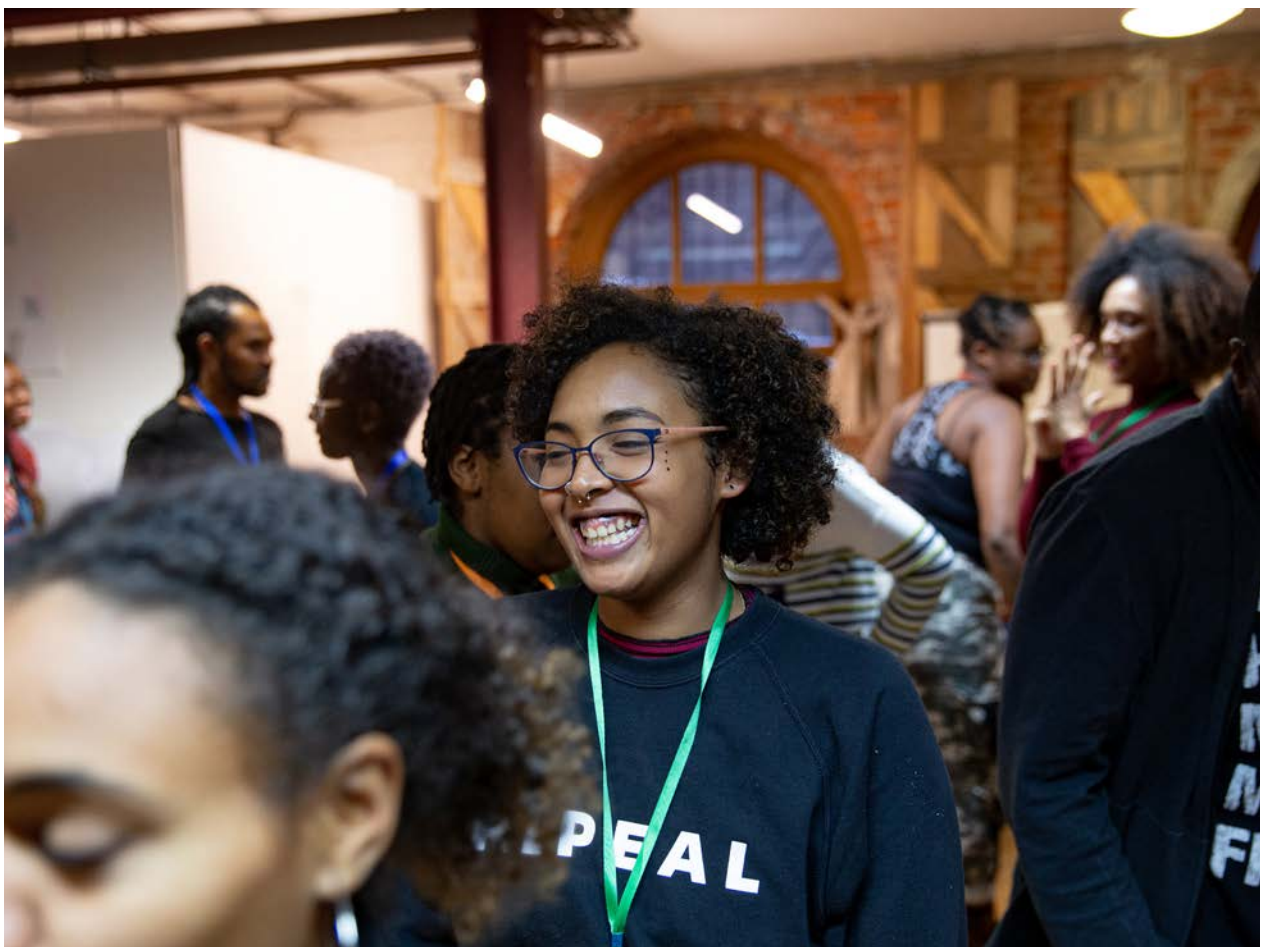
KIN is a values driven network and it is integral to the convening that this is embedded at the start. The opening session, run by KIN co-founders Zahra and Kennedy, aimed to make these values (outlined in the previous section) clear to the group. Laura Barker, a member of the KIN UK-based participant support team, felt this session not only explained KIN's history and values but also organically brought the topics of privilege and vulnerability up early on.

## **Laura Barker on What is KIN? Welcome and introductions**

I am low key obsessed with what Kennedy calls 'container building' so I was super into our opening session. It started out with Zahra and Kennedy giving a short rundown on KIN's history. A participant told me after that it's obvious how much work had gone into this, and it's a good way to ground the weekend (obviously I was thrilled to hear this).

Then we did some speed dating. We got folks into pairs and asked their favourite games as a child, and whether or not they allow outside shoes in the house (no shaming allowed). The room felt like it was buzzing. It was cute seeing people get to know each other and I was still on a high from having everyone in the same room after months of preparation and travel arrangements and issues with securing visas for participants.

After, we did an activity on what blackness means to you. I actually can't remember any of the responses now but what I do remember is an absolute intensity in the room, and it being really difficult to tear folks away from this activity. I think it could have gone on all afternoon. When we came back together we touched on how the organising team is light skinned, and what that means when we're the people asking for quiet, bringing activities to an end, etc. Marsha went into the complexities of mixedness, how it's a privilege in some places and a barrier to success in others.



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# Colonialism and its global legacies

The impact of colonialism on people living across the diaspora and on the continent recurred as a theme throughout the convening. This cut across most of the workshops, not only in relation to the Western Imperialism but also how this can create and sustain power hierarchies between and within the diaspora and the continent.

## **The People's History Museum tour: a lack of imperial interrogation**

On the first day of the convening, a lunchtime tour of the People's History Museum in Manchester highlighted how the engagement of British institutions, such as museums, can skirt over and avoid injustices and legacy of enslavement and Empire. In 2014, the Department for Education admitted that it did not know how many schools were teaching the slavery and enslavement as a subject (Sky News, 2014).

A 2014 YouGov survey found that, out of 1741 British adults surveyed, 59 per cent reported that they were proud of the British Empire. While imperial pride was higher among older people, about half (48 percent) of 18–24-year-olds felt pride in the Empire (YouGov, 2014). The survey did not include an evaluation of how black people, or any ethnic minorities, felt about the Empire. A more recent survey from 2019 found that 69 percent of people felt that historical injustice, colonialism and the role of the British Empire should be taught as part of the national curriculum (YouGov, 2019).

A discussion to process questions the tour raised was held back at the convening venue, led by Marsha Garratt, a UK-based participant and a member of the participant support team. Participants raised that there was only

one small section on the slave trade and its abolition in UK and yet a big section on the Haitian rebellion against France. Another raised that there was a focus on non-British imperialisms, such as the slave trade in the Arab World slave trade and French Imperialism in Haiti. One participant found the story of a black activist from history that they had not heard of previously, consigned to a draw that they happened to open during the tour.

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***“Where is the history of women, women, queer history, that’s missing from our own curriculum as a result of British colonisation? That’s what I wanted to see and learn about,”***  
– participant

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Some participants shared that they felt the shift from a black activist space to a museum that caters to a white audience was challenging. Others felt the tour guide struggled to talk about race, although there was an appreciation by some that the museum was open to feedback and criticism.

### **Marsha Garratt on the People's History Museum tour**

The 2019 KIN convening visited the People's History Museum in Manchester for a personal guided tour on the history of Manchester. One KIN participant support worker had liaised with the museum, prior to the trip, to assess what the museum could offer participants regarding black history in the UK; and was informed the museum included information which would suit the needs of KIN.



Needless to say, the trip brought mixed feelings over the Eurocentric presentation of artefacts. Several participants noted that there was a lack of information on the involvement of black people in the fight against state oppression which took place in Manchester. For example, the museum recognised that the development of Manchester was fuelled by African slave labour on cotton plantations in the West Indies and America, yet this was not given as much attention as the oppression of the white working class in Manchester.

This led to disengagement and annoyance from some of the participants particularly when the term 'Universal suffrage' was used as an accolade for the actions of white people against oppression but this did not apply to African people in bondage, thus not universal.

A small slide on Robert Wedderburn (one of the only black people to be featured in the exhibit) was disappointingly kept in a drawer, and did not reference that Robert, originally born in Jamaica to a Scottish father and enslaved African mother, had been monitored and intimidated by the state for his abolition work. The work of Ras T Makonnen, a Pan African who had several businesses in Manchester catering to the needs of black soldiers, ostracised by Britain's colour bar during World War 2, was also a very small display.

The display did not champion the fact that Makonnen had partly funded the fifth Pan African Congress held in Manchester in 1945. The Congress had attendees such as Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, Amy Ashwood Garvey, W.E.B Dubois and George Padmore. The display should have contained far more information on the significance of this Congress and Ras T Makonnen in general.

At the end of the tour KIN participants were invited to view the archives which brought a combination of disappointment as well as some truly amazing photographs of collective black action against structural racism. One key thing noted by the participants is these photographs were not on public display



and were held in a file called, 'Law and Civil Disorder'; reinforcing the concept that collective black action against racism is disorderly.

The photographs themselves were incredible and of the participants who visited the archives, many enjoyed viewing them and taking pictures for their own memories. The photographs featured people such as Dorothy Cherry Groce, whom police shot and paralysed in Brixton and Cynthia Jarret who died from heart failure after police raided her home in Tottenham. Following the racist attacks on these two women by the state, the black community organised marches and demonstrations against the police which were also captured in photographs held in the archives, leading to much discussion on how little has changed.

One participant from the US said, "If they weren't in black and white these photographs could be from last week or last month. Especially after the murder of Tamir Rice."

I sincerely believe the museum felt that the 'People's History' is captured in their display, but it was clear more needs to be done to decolonize their displays and share the truth of the fight African and Caribbean people have against racism in the UK.

## **Western Imperialism in Queer West African movements**

This session, run by Stéphane Simpore via Skype, interrogated how Western imperialism not only impacts how queerness is understood in West Africa but also what should be prioritised in their movements.

Stéphane stated that the queer movement is growing in West Africa recognising for example, the needs of intersex and trans people and the reproductive needs of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual women. Although the more well-acknowledged impacts of colonialism, such as a Western understanding of gender binaries, legal inheritances and the influence of religion, the globalisation of queer struggles means that whatever is considered important in the West is prioritised in their movements. The funding and technical resources to work on these issues in Africa are primarily from Western and Northern countries with the power of this philanthropy forcing particular priorities in the movement. Further, Western narratives tend to focus on the victimisation of queer community in Africa rather than solidarity, agency, resistance and change.

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***“For most people in West Africa, a rainbow flag is just a pretty umbrella” - Stéphane***

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Participants agreed that if struggles are to be truly intersectional, it needs to recognise what works locally in different contexts, whilst offering something global that can unite movements. This must consider economic, environmental and cultural questions.

Gigi Louisa, a participant from Kenya, shared some best practice from her work with the Gay and Lesbian coalition. She uses a holistic approach that addresses five aspects of security: security within the media, physical security, legal security, health security and psychological security. The organisation focuses on strengthening capacity at each level, starting from the individual (you and I); growing outwards to friends, family, schools, churches to the national media and political and legal institutions. If a funder does not understand the local context and has preconceived solutions, they turn the money down. She acknowledged that not everyone is in a position to turn down such an offer if they are poorly resourced.

Stéphane also made clear the privilege he had in terms of political education. He was lucky enough to have access to literature from the African continent and the US that enabled him to claim the queer and feminist as political identities. He considers himself part of the African feminist movement but in his context and experience, most people didn't know what this means. He tries to share this knowledge as much as he can with his country and culture with the knowledge as a solution. How the global movement can facilitate this sharing of knowledge that is tailored to different countries and cultures was agreed by participants to be an important question for reflection. Equally, building an independent philanthropic system to support the queer movement and other movements for black liberation was raised.

The need for economic autonomy was a recurring topic throughout the convening (see chapter X, *Alternative Futures*).

## **What does it mean to be intersex and African with Crystal Hendricks?**

The dominance of Western understandings of queer identities and the language used globally recurred as a discussion point

throughout the convening. In Crystal Hendricks session on what it means to be intersex and African session (run via Skype from South Africa), these topics were live once again.

**Josina Calliste on *What does it means to be intersex and African with Crystal Hendricks***

In communities, we are in the early stages of liberating discussions about gender, which includes trans rights, interrogation of masculinities and femininities, and more open discussion of common reproductive health conditions such as polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), which can fall under the intersex umbrella. However societies are ignorant about the existence of intersex people, despite this group making up an estimated 1% of the global population. Even in LGBTQ communities, intersex identities are often left out of discussions unless we're trying to prove a point in a discussion about the existence of more than two genders.

Which is why I was so glad Crystal talked to us about being intersex and African. She started with her own story - when she was 15 years old and realised she hadn't gone through puberty as her peers had. As an increasingly-woke 22 year old, she learned more about intersex conditions, sex characteristics and that she had XY chromosomes and internal testes. She also, on the questionable advice of a doctor, had her ovaries removed.

Learning about how intersex is treated in South Africa was enlightening, yet worrying. I fear it's not much better in most countries, although recognised rights of intersex persons do vary widely. Crystal told us that in South Africa, intersex children are often treated as a curse. Some research with midwives indicated more than 60 children were killed at birth. This typically occurred in rural areas. When a midwife couldn't determine a newborn's gender they would go into the next room, crack the baby's head and tell the parent that the baby was stillbirth.

Crystal highlighted that not all intersex characteristics are identifiable from birth. In

contrast to rural areas, intersex children in urban areas may have the 'privilege' of not being killed by a birth attendant, but may undergo medical intervention to 'normalise' or 'fix' the child by assigning them a gender. She described how many intersex friends didn't identify with the gender assigned to them, and also felt left out of LGBTI spaces.

Crystal shared four quotes from African intersex friends. Ronie from Zimbabwe had said:

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***“Every day I face violence, stigma and discrimination towards me [...] Being intersex in Africa is widely misunderstood, therefore it carries many myths which has resulted in the death of many intersex people.”***

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James from Kenya said *“I being an intersex African reaffirms that intersex persons exist in each and every society that we have. No matter how the system and medicine try to erase us, we shall always be there.”*

Crystal also shared a short video as part of her presentation, by Intersex South Africa (ISSA) and the founder, Sally Gross. The film is pioneering in providing footage of people being out and intersex. Crystal compared the similar self-advocacy struggles trans and intersex persons experience; that bodily autonomy can mean fighting to be able to have gender affirming surgical procedures in trans communities, but fighting to not be forced or coerced into surgery for intersex people.

Contributions from the audience included the case of Baby A in Kenya. We discussed medical and non-medical language in English around intersex, untranslatable words, and African languages which have no gender.

Discrimination for intersex person included being chased out of a community for being a witch (for women who were unmarried or living alone) and accused of bewitching that community. For rural community where no English spoken the challenge is: how can you explain intersex identities to them? One participant stated that we shouldn't rely on colonial languages, that blackness is inherently queer, and being intersex is inherently African. She gave the example of the Orishas, and that many African deities shifted genders. Crystal encouraged us to use inclusive language in activism around reproductive rights, and other body-centred political organising.

Research conducted with elders of different communities in Kenya, suggested that intersex people were viewed as special people that shouldn't be interfered with. Although this account came from medical doctors in the Victorian era, it suggested that intersex people were appreciated, not shunned. For countries dealing with the remnants of colonial laws, the need to decolonise Victorian mores, and approach intersex rights alongside decriminalising same-sex activity, and recognising there are many trans people who are intersex, and intersex people hiding within LGBTQ communities.

Crystal shared the story of David Reimer and the discredited psychologist John Money. This case was used as rationale for sex reassignment for thousands of intersex children: the "malleability of gender" when case was reported as a success. Conversely, she gave the example of an intersex child in South Africa whose parents fled to escape surgery. This child is living happily after 10 years because they didn't have any medical intervention as a baby.

One participant said after the session: "As an intersex person I find most well-meaning queers in the West population and near the end of the forever expanding LGBTQIA acronym at the top of their event or group or policy, and then get very defensive when you ask them how they are including intersex folks. It was humbling to come from this context

and listen to the work the incredible Crystal Hendricks is doing, from working around intersex infanticide to having conversations with elders about precolonial words for intersex, and I'm so honoured to have met her."

Including intersex people in our political organising helps us be better activists. We have to ensure we're not only mentioning intersex people at the end of our LGBTQ+ spiels, using their existence in order to get funding for LGBTQ projects. Support for intersex people goes beyond mentioning their existence. Remember that 26th October is International Intersex Awareness Day, and Intersex Day of Solidarity is on the 8th November.

## **Thoughts, Prayers and what more? What does solidarity mean to us?**

The legacies of Western imperialism has created hierarchies of power *within* and *between* the diaspora. To build a global liberation movement, it is imperative this difference in power and privilege is acknowledged and understood. It is important that people can see themselves as part of a global movement that also recognises difference and avoids erasure. The previous chapter shows that this is particularly pertinent within the queer liberation movement. How solidarity is practiced should reflect the divergent access to resources that is evident across the diaspora.

*The session Thoughts, Prayers and what more? What does solidarity mean to us with Teju Adisa Farrar* reinforced the need to acknowledge how this positionality and privilege affects the injustices black people face across the world and how we respond to them. Run by Teju Adisa-Farrar, a Jamaican-American writer and poet, she wanted to challenge the American-centrism and Eurocentrism that disproportionately bring attention and solidarity to movements against black injustices in these parts of the world over others.



She began with a privilege exercise, where she read out the names of black people who had been killed as a result of police brutality in various countries. Participants were to stand up if they had heard of the victims. Most of the room only knew the names of men from the United States. This pushed participants to question why they knew some names over others. For example, a participant shared that more transgender women killed in South Africa than in the US but we only know one story.

Participants noted that wealth, geographic privilege, the dominance of English language media and academia all encouraged this dominance of the US context over others. Others noted that the legacy of Imperialism had deemed certain forms of knowledge as legitimate sources and named English as the “language of Imperialism”. Access to technology then makes the spread of this knowledge easier, even deaths. This increases the solidarity received by US based movements, particularly from European countries.

There was much agreement that the US has always commodified its Civil Rights movement, making even its present day movements a reference point across the continent and diaspora. Patriarchy also influenced who is remembered and who

is forgotten. Even when a death occurs in the US, the names of women, particularly transwomen, are not as widely known.

Whether this solidarity given to US movements can be called “a privilege” was a point of contention. This discomfort remained unresolved.

A participant noted that the South African struggle against apartheid is also “privileged” over others in the discourse of struggle. This is often based around a few individuals rather than collective action and incremental changes that resulted from incremental decision-making.

When an individual then dies, international solidarity dies with it.

Another participant gave the example of South Africa post-1994, when Nelson Mandela was elected President. Previous to this, Africa was in solidarity with South Africa, as was a sizable global movement. There was little solidarity for the post-Apartheid era, the residual pain, violence and now xenophobia that is thriving. The participant shared that it is easier to be in solidarity with one man facing injustice, as Mandela was portrayed, than a less digestible myriad of problems facing the post-Apartheid state.

There was agreement amongst the participants that when a struggle is commodified, it ends up being stuck in one time and solidarity dissipates. To prevent this from happening, participants agreed that movements must be decentralised and transnational, as to make them less vulnerable.

To build solidarity across contexts, participants suggested that solidarity must be active and focus outside of their immediate community. For example, sending resources to support groups if you have the means to. Promoting the messages of black struggles to new audiences was also suggested. Solidarity moving beyond 'support' and towards common objectives and shared goals was agreed to be essential to global movement building.



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# Criminalising black bodies

## The Hostile Environment

When it comes to immigration and asylum, the UK Home Office modus operandi is the 'hostile environment', which aims to discourage people from coming to the UK; to stop those who do come from overstaying and to stop irregular migrants being able to access the essentials of an ordinary life (Free Movement, 2018). The Institute for Government describes the Hostile Environment as "bureaucracy, complexity and an uncompromising approach to applications is used to make life difficult for many migrants" (IfG, 2018). The UK's immigration regime is exempt from the Equality Act 2010, as it would fail on grounds of racial discrimination if it did.

This convening was open to activists from across the African continent and diaspora. It was essential that the intersection of blackness across borders was reflected. However, the realities of the UK's border regime hindered the ability to do so. The KIN support team put in ten visa requests, of which five were denied. Some were rejected because they could not prove they had enough in savings to convince the Home Office that they were not coming to the UK to seek work, and were therefore at risk of overstaying their visa. Others were rejected due to embassy backlog, police confiscation of passport, withholding of someone's new passport. Messages from the participants who were unable to be physically in the space were written down so they could still be included and recognised. Session leaders Stéphane Simpore and Crystal Hendricks ran their workshops via Skype as a means of circumventing the border regime.

In the session *Freedom to Stay, Freedom to Move: Migration and Anti-blackness with Anshantia Oso and Haiti and the DR: migration, racism and US imperialism*, the realities of

racialised immigration policies and anti-migration rhetoric and the potential for a way forward, were discussed.

### **Yirbett: *Workshop by Ashantia on immigration***

From the hands of Tia, we enter into the recognition of the multiple ghosts that have accompanied migration throughout history. This effort, which is regularly driven by the need for work and a better lifestyle, has been impregnated with trauma and rejection through the generations in our families. Even today we see how migratory systems make us feel insecure, not welcome, rejected and over-guarded in any country we are heading to. Traveling for the community is always a process full of anxiety.

One of the most transcendental spaces during the session is when several of the members had the opportunity to share our family stories. It was helpful to analyse how our families have arrived at the place they are in and the various traumas accumulated generationally during the journey.

It was quite inspiring to find solidarity between us through our experiences and to be able to find a point of support in our partners to relieve the wounds. It is important to know that you are not alone in your situation and knowing people who have experienced your same vicissitudes allows you to have a different view of things.

We talked about the multiple barriers that immigration systems impose on us and how they are regulated by personal opinions and economic reasons.

We also discuss how the processes that have given rise to the African diaspora have a label of sacrifice and abuse. The factors that are

common when we analyse the stories of our ancestors and how we get to where we are. It is a highly convulsive and diffuse story in which our ancestors often prefer to omit the details instead of exposing ourselves to the cruel realities that were lived.

I feel completely grateful for the workshop received, for the opportunity to know the stories of my colleagues and find solidarity and community in them when we understand that we all go through the same damage.

## **The School to prison pipeline with Zahra Bei**

The incarceration of bodies recurred as a reality across the diaspora. The policing of school students was raised as a concern by participants in the UK, France, Sweden and Kenya. In the session, *The School to Prison Pipeline*, run by Zahra Bei there was much agreement with, and recognition of, the issues she was describing. Zahra described schools as a 'holding pen' children to much agreement from participants.

The phrase 'school to prison pipeline' describes the relationship between the increasing use of zero tolerance policies in schools (such as permanent and informal exclusions) and the criminalising, punitive social policies to manage wider social problems (such as incarceration) (Graham, 2014). As Zahra described the disproportionate number of boys who are permanently excluded from schools (i.e. 3x the rate of White British boys in England and Wales) but also informal exclusions (i.e. encouraging parents to take their children out of school just before exams "off the record"), there was smiling, nodding and exclamations of support and recognition.

There was shock in the room when she retold the story of a student who asked "why" in class and got a one hour detention and another who had 'high-fived' another student and received a detention. Similarly, when she read a letter written to her by a student, describing their experiences at school as school is a dictatorship" that was "stripping

them of individuality", and used "solitary confinement" as a form of punishment, shock was expressed by participants. She also mentioned police being stationed outside of school gates and some schools being subject to "random searches".

Other participants noted similar situations in schools in their country. In the US "behaviour hubs" and an increasing police presence in schools were a growing concern. In Sweden, children were highly valued, however, this did not extend to non-white children. Somali children in particular, are subject to behaviour monitoring by teachers and state agencies. Somali parents are problematised as "not bringing up children well" with many taken into the care system and cared for by white parents. When they return to their parents age seventeen, they struggle to reconnect. The participant suggested suicide rates and entry into the criminal justice system after this is common.

Parallels were made between the UK's Prevent programme, a duty to have 'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism', that requires teachers to

look out for and report on children suspected of being drawn into terrorism (Gov.uk, 2019). One participant said that when she taught previously in the UK, she was told to single out children who were in single parent families, had learning disabilities or spent time alone on the computer in her Prevent training. Others mentioned that France has similar policies and the US mimics it in regard to border control and undocumented migration.

Participant Gigi Louise, mentioned that in Kenya, some of these practices of control had been inherited via colonialism. Hair discrimination is prevalent, with a 13 year old student winning a case in court against a school that claimed their dreadlocks were "untidy". Similar cases have garnered attention in the UK and US. Yet, in a majority African country, these inherited ways of policing bodies were still in place. Equally, girls writing notes to other girls can lead to punishment such as being locked in the chemistry lab



all day or being suspended for suspected lesbianism. Girls were still not prioritised for school in rural areas.

There are important differences in how schools are a site of opportunity and regulation across the diaspora. Victor Aweke, a participant from Nigeria who now resides in the US, told the space that he had to walk five miles with his chair to get to school every day. The learning conditions were poor and rain would drop into the classroom. He said that in the developed world the system did not believe in change and used 'behaviour management' as a way to stop students becoming agents of change. In the developing world, economic crises are the barrier to students becoming agents of change. Gigi Louise echoed this, stating that in Grade 2 she had to walk to a bus stop miles away and would leave school at 8pm.

Yirbett Joseph, a participant from the Dominican Republic of both Dominican and Haitian descent, reinforced this. He described the Dominican school system as entirely privatised, with providers commissioned by the state. This led to perverse incentives for providers who, to increase profits, overcharged for school meals that were low in nutritional value. They changed the books used every year so they could not be passed on to siblings or friends. Schools cost two-times a monthly wage, excluding poorer people from accessing education.

But hope, he said, brings about change beyond borders.

## Drugs and criminalisation

The prohibition and criminalisation of particular drugs has led to major harms to individuals, communities and nations (Transform, 2018). For people, this has led to disproportionate drug-related harms, deportation, criminalisation and incarceration (Sentencing Council, 2020; The War on Drugs and the Global Colour Line, 2019).

Drugs mean different things in different contexts but the word is heavily politicised. Cassandra Frederique, who is based in



the US, ran a session on the links between drug use and incarceration that also pushed participants to consider their own relationship and positionality to drugs and the language we use to describe it. "The way we organise is affected by our emotional connection and responses to particular drugs, she told participants, so we need to talk about how we feel about drugs before we get to policy."

Participants agreed that what is considered a drug (a controlled substance or any synthesised medicine) is loaded, commodified and seen through the prism of the white gaze. Victor Aweke noted that in Nigeria, Tylenol, an American brand of common cold cough syrup, is considered a drug.



There was much agreement that it is the state's relationship with drugs and the way it legislates that is at issue. Whether it's the criminal justice system, economic policy, rehabilitation efforts or how legalisation efforts are not redistributive, it is the state (and states and supranational organisations), not drugs in and of themselves that lead to these harms.

A global network and global effort should be the response.

***Antonia Lee on Drug use, drug policy and incarceration with Netta and Cassandra Frederique***

The conversation we hold in our hearts for drug incarceration reflects the outward actions we can take to support our kin who are drug dependent. Cassandra, a sibling from across the Atlantic, gracefully and playfully carried a conversation on drug policy, treatment and penalisation. Taking us beyond the language and bureaucracies of law, into physical, shifting movements, embodied and discursive reflections of drugs and our relationships to them were the focal part of this session.

The convening room, at first, was organised in a circle of chairs, with some faces eye to eye, others covered by pillars- leaving random limbs and the entrails of bags visible. Belongings laid out, I was forced to use my imagination to fill the gaps for the entire person out of sight. It became a necessity, once some of the initial introductions between folks had been made, to destroy the circle structure and activate our bodies, fill the space, and create new connections with the figures in the room. The subtle, but radical refiguration of space, echoed the intellectual reconfigurations that Cassandra was fostering in the space.

The simple question, with never a simple answer, was to choose a third of the room which resonated most with you. The far left we had "I love drugs", the far right we had "I hate drugs" and in the middle "I don't really care about drugs". I found myself very quickly drifting to the left of the room, physically following the difficult memories of my own to contend with, but the delightful

Drugs can be used for a number of reasons. When they are used to cope with other issues, such as mental health or economic issues, it is a harm reduction approach that is needed. The root causes of harmful use need to be addressed. Yet people are disproportionately impacted by the policing of drug supply and not in harm reduction. Kasandra surprised the space when she mentioned that people in the US are being harmed by the opioid crisis and overdosing but are rarely part of the discussion or coverage of it. The harm reduction network she runs works to counter this.

and positive principles I held regarding choice and liberation. It stood out soon enough that this was an exercise in reasoning, it was an exercise in opinion, in choice and in experience. Due to personal reasons, I had missed the morning of the convening, so having a face to face opportunity to speak openly with others about their reflections on drugs, on what they do, and what they engrave in experience, felt like the dissolution of awkward first conversations and social insecurities. After speaking in smaller groups, Cassandra opened the floor to voices across the room, saying candidly why they loved/hated/didn't care about drugs.

The baseline for the conversation, commanded with ease from Cassandra, was a stance of non-discrimination to the types of drugs which can be taken, and the types of treatment that drug undergoes. Just because a drug may grow in the ground, and is spoken of in a botanical or romanticised way, doesn't make it suddenly safer than a drug we think of in chemical terms, or associated with class, race or gender. All people, drug dependent or not, deserve safety and deserve dignity, and that any drug we can depend on can be taken safely. A truly radical message, which is difficult in many material ways to contend with. Reshaping our principles of communication with drugs means accepting that drugs come in a myriad of forms, and any being dependent should not be abandoned. Viewing drugs and their users as commodities, or as part of an abusive capitalist system, alienates us from human needs and the compassion which can support a system of care in drug taking.

What stood out the most was the honesty of Cassandra's own relationship to drugs, prior to her advocacy. Cassandra admittedly was a person who hated drugs, and it is this message of journeys to radically compassionate politics that inspired me to take forward a refreshed approach to my own activism. Starting with our own complicated relationships with social, political and economic problem, is what allows our activism to be processual and rooted in growth. It is the choice then to de-centralise ourselves

from what we love, and fight with compassion and care for fellow beings. blackness is the constant thread between most of my own experiences, but what creates hope in times of non-visible horizons is creating capacity for personhood not like my own. My blackness is important to me, but the entirety of experience is accredited to the multiplicity of people.

### **Yirbertt Joseph on Drug use, drug policy and incarceration with Netta and Cassandra Frederique**

In a quite eloquent way, Cassandra helped us to look from another perspective on how the dynamics of drug use in our society are seen from the lens of a double standard in which historically the consequences are always more severe for people. We find that drug use in the community is often punished not only with jail but also with multiple forms of social execution that prevent our reintegration into our communities and fail to offer us help or alternatives.

We came to understand that it is a situation that requires our solidarity and our understanding among all of us, no matter where we are within the spectrum of drug acceptance. It is important that we participate in the critical analysis and set the actions for cultural transformations in our communities so that the use drugs can be free of the stigma that has accompanied them for so long.

We analysed how colonialism and alienation has contributed to the demonization of practices that were previously considered by our ancestor as attempts to connect with a higher level of spirituality. We also looked at how with the excuse of a moral elitism, these practices have been misrepresented, appropriated and manipulated for economic reasons that vary according to capitalist objectives.

One of the most special moments during the workshop is when we could all take a turn to explain our opinions about the use of drugs and the various prejudices that have been implanted in our minds. We could see how through an arduous self-analysis work, it is



possible to deconstruct, unlearn and relearn a more condescending approach to the situation. We understood that an essential part of decolonization is the adoption of a new language and a new way of thinking that allows us to understand social phenomena from a place of deeper solidarity. It is our hands to integrate the ancestral traditions that have been expropriated from us.

## Technology as surveillance of bodies

Our personal data is now a commodity used increasingly by states and corporations for monitoring and profit making. The session *Reclaim your Data* by UK-based Rob Berkeley and Antonia Lee explored how technology is being used to further entrench the disproportionate policing of bodies. The ambiguities around where our data ends up makes it difficult to monitor and as a result, it must be challenged. Antonia used the example of new portable fingerprint scanning technology that was being rolled out in West Yorkshire and how they challenged it via the *Stop the Scan* campaign.

Antonia and Rob emphasised the inaccuracies of the technology being implemented in the UK by police forces and the Home Office (border control) because they are developed

with white skin as the default but deployed disproportionately against people of colour. Inaccurate data may then be shared across government departments (e.g. police to Home Office). A participant who works in a US WeWork that uses facial recognition to get into the building, noted that it cannot see her face. Equally, Rob spoke about a soap dispenser at Facebook's headquarters that doesn't recognise people's hands and will not dispense soap when their hands are placed under it.

Gigi Louise noted that in Kenya similar technology was being deployed to track Somali, Congolese and Ethiopian migrants. Fingerprint and facial recognition technology was used in order to purchase a SIM card at Vodafone stores. Privacy International have raised concerns about the use of biometrics to purchase SIM cards, which can be used to target ethnic and religious minorities that disagree with the State and have a chilling effect on social action. A lack of robust data protection laws was also a concern (Privacy International, 2019). Other participants shared that ID cards are used to police people, with a disproportionate impact on people of colour. France and South Africa were given as examples. Not having it on your person could result in arrest.

To resist this use of data requires a knowledge of who owns and controls it. Rob noted that if he wanted data for research on queer men in UK, he wouldn't go to the UK government's Census data, he would approach the dating app Grindr. It is better not just for advertisers, but for estimating the size of the population. Daily, we volunteer significant amounts of data to companies. Rob suggested this is perhaps more than we're giving to state agencies. We're probably volunteering more information daily than we're giving to the police or other state agencies, although they are intertwined.

To resist effectively, is not only to keep up with technology and who owns the data we share and what is done with it. We must also vision a future in which we are not exploited and plan how we can get there.

## Tiff on Reclaim your data with Rob Berkeley and Antonia Lee

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***'At the beginning is reclaiming your data - there isn't a clear way to reclaim that data. What we can do is reclaim the Gaze.'***  
- Antonia Lee

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**Biometrics** - is the technical term for body measurements and calculations. It refers to metrics related to human characteristics. Biometrics authentication (or realistic authentication) is used in computer science as a form of identification and access control. It is also used to identify individuals in groups that are under surveillance.

**Reclaim your data** session, led by Antonia Lee and Rob Berkley, was aimed at looking at the advances in tech and facial recognition and its implications. Thinking about how biometrics intertwines with institutional racism. Sharing experiences of campaigning against fingerprint scanning in Yorkshire, and the use of DNA on the national database.

This was a highly informative session, shedding light and bringing awareness to current violent UK law enforcement practices that are currently underway, opening up the space to allow for us to discuss other practices in our own countries, that we are aware of (or unaware), and explore strategies of resistance to these forms of hyper-surveillance.

Mobile biometric scanning devices were piloted by West Yorkshire police from Feb 2018 - April 2018. During this process, a campaign emerged titles: **'Stop the Scan: #STOPtheSCANDal'**. The site provided further information on the purpose behind this new technology, being that, The Home Office has recently funded a national rollout of mobile fingerprint scanners linked to immigration databases, turning the UK police into a border force.

*'As the Windrush scandal shows, this move could lead to mass detentions and deportations. with an invitation to Join to Stop the Scandal, before it hits local streets.'*  
([stopthescan.co.uk](http://stopthescan.co.uk))

This was a Home Office strategic mobile plan to stop anyone they suspect making a crime (who are predominantly POC migrants), via fingerprint scanners to verify criminal and immigration databases. The conversation led us to how these were intrusive, racist practices which are being translated via new tech, as new forms of hyper-surveillance and to store data without consent. The home office feeds this data into a National criminal and immigration data base system.

This naturally lead to the sharing of narratives of death, in relation to police violence and custody. The death of Joy Gardner in 1993, who was chased down by Home office for staying over her VISA, was brutally pinned down by officers, causing her death, was shared as an example of the violence enacted by the UK Home Office.

The discussion led to the reality of new biometric tech enabling racism from beyond point of contact.

### **This Approach being:**

Biometric based on racist phrenology, meaning to be based in a racialised system using whiteness as the module, whiteness being a prototype.

### **Forms being:**

- **Open Biometrics:** Initiative fingerprints and open listing of probabilistic minutiae
- **Closed Biometric system:** component authority is the home office

On talks of verification perpetuated discrimination, work by the artist Robin Rhode was referenced *Pan Opticon Stides 2009* alongside the written work by Simone Browne on hyper surveillance technology which was shared amongst the group.

The group discussed the legal basis claimed by police for using the technology and policies currently in place. Protection of the laws that allows this tech is enabling police brutality. PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984) and the Victims unit in the police and the protection were discussed, - (police can still suspect you of a crime under this law).

Within Forms of Racial profiling and discriminations, forms of biometric data storing in Kenya were shared. Data is captured via a mobile phone sim card. To have a sim - your data is taken biometrically. The criminalisation of HIV positive folx in KENYA, sex workers, etc. was highlighted, with mentions of the Global Fund in Kenya.

Discussion went on to the practices of the UK Home Office processing and accepting VISAS and the misuse of Surrey Police social media platforms posting their use of biometric technology via social media tweets and conversations on the vilified language used for viewership, spectacularisation and seemly entrainment, to those reading the tweets by the police force.



Overall this caused a lot of conversation around the importance of biometrics and how new tech is being formatted and programmed through a specific lens and with rules and sequences that reflect racist phrenology. Leading to conclusions of the need for more POC, more folx involved in new tech programming and a larger campaign against these violent forms of hyper-surveillance and data storage of bodies that are gradually being rolled out.

Ways to get involved, sharing platforms, networks in relation to raise awareness of these devices were shared, and is a way I personally will be implementing into my own practice and community.

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# Justice, autonomy and redistribution: Alternative futures for the diaspora

Creating a vision of a more just future for people globally was discussed in several sessions. Justice, autonomy and redistribution recurred as themes throughout the convening as key to achieving liberation. So what does such a future comprise of?

## black alternative economies

Wealth and resource ownership confers power to those who have it. In *black Alternative Economies with Tiffany Webster*, UK-based Tiff charted how people have been restricted from engagement in economies and policed when attempting to create their own. As discussed, bodies continue to be policed and regulated, and Tiff linked this to the history of enslavement, where bodies were valued as currency, commodities and assets. A lack of land and asset ownership hinders the passing on of intergenerational wealth.

The history of imperialism, Gigi Louise noted, has disrupted the ownership of land in Kenya. The crops planted, what is cooked, how it is cooked (e.g. forests cut down for fuel) and who owns it (much was given to missionaries) has had a lasting effect. Children were sent to school in exchange for a bag of corn where they were taught to maintain the system.

Tiff highlighted that collective economies of resistance are limited by the state. During the Tulsa riots, the prosperous African-American community of Greenwood (colloquially known as black Wall Street) was set alight and people murdered by white supremacists. Nonetheless, informal networks of community support have continued to exist. Most participants had heard of a version of a rotating savings and credit association (ROSCA) in their country or community (such as *pardner*, *Susu* or *Rounds*).

Participants agreed that people should take responsibility for the financial literacy of the community and not be afraid to do so. However, there was also agreement that this should be critical and be wary of extraction. A discomfort with a form of capitalism that is based on the enslavement and extraction of resources from the diaspora is understandable.

Instead of avoidance, informed engagement was encouraged. For example, if you invest in medicinal marijuana, you could reinvest some of the profits into a -owned businesses.

The future could contain a community of complementary currencies. Digital versions of *pardner* such as Stepladder UK and Esusu UK will live side by side with cryptocurrencies and local currencies such as the Brixton pound in the UK and CES Cape Town.

## Zahra Bei on *black Alternatives Economies with Tiffany Webster*

### 1. Content

An extremely well-researched session about a subject that is very close to, my organisation, No More Exclusions at this moment in time and to me personally as a black organiser and Business teacher. The content was deeply rooted in a historical frame of black and alternative economies which reminded us of whose shoulders we are standing on. The presentation comprised of 27 thoroughly researched, accessible and detailed slides. Highlights for me personally included: the birth of monetary systems; black economics and black Wall Street; black rotating credit and savings associations; digital forms of currencies. The most poignant aspect of this presentation from a black archival perspective. This presentation contained an audio interview between Tiff and her elderly Caribbean

grandmother explaining pardna and how her, her husband and contemporaries from the Windrush generation raised cash, saved money and generally supported themselves as a community on arrival to Britain post 1948. This presentation is the one that taught me the most in terms of completely new knowledge i.e. by referencing and explaining community currencies, endogenous money systems, current digital ROSCA platforms and Blockchain Mining all which were completely new concepts to me.

## **2. Style**

A really attractive, well-designed, extremely well-researched, multi-modal appealing presentation.

## **3. Delivery**

Tiff delivered quite challenging content in a way that was accessible and engaging for everyone in the session in my view. Her style was relaxed, friendly and dialogical. The presentation was pacey and packed with rich information, critically and carefully posited in black history and black economics.

## **4. Impact**

This was probably the most useful session for me out of the whole KIN Weekender. NME as a black-led radical coalition abolitionist grassroots movement in education is currently at a stage where we are having to make key strategic decisions around sustainability, funding, structure and ethics. This session provided so much food for thought and reminded me that as a black-led collective we are not starting from scratch. We are always standing on the shoulders of giants as black movement builders. What we need to do is regularly take time out to research and learn from our history, from the many greats who went before us and see what we can learn from the successes and failures of the past and the challenges and opportunities of the present and future. Above all this session inspired us to remain steadfast in the belief we can build sustainable black-led movements without compromising our core values and without becoming dependent on the very oppressive structures we are trying to dismantle.

I thoroughly recommend this session, the subject matter and the speaker to all black movement-builders. Good for the soul too!

## **Reparatory justice: redistributing power to enable a new settlement**

The importance of ownership and economic empowerment as a feature of liberation was echoed in a workshop on reparatory justice. As discussed in Tiff's session, historical and present processes such as land ownership, displacement, extraction and all limit economic engagement and necessitates the need for alternatives. In UK-based Josina Calliste and Kwesi Shaddai's workshop on reparatory justice built on this to showcase how reparatory justice could provide a framework for redistributing power. They emphasised that reparatory justice isn't about money but is about challenging unequal power distributions. Participants agreed with this approach and definition. Returning artefacts taken by imperial powers during the European empires, cancelling personal and developing countries' debts without conditions, and ending exploitative resource extraction (e.g. cobalt extraction Congo) are all forms of reparations. The term debt was deemed inaccurate by participants, as the history that brought those debts into being were grossly unjust.

Josina and Kwesi see land justice was key to achieving reparatory justice. The relationship to land is different in each context but they raised some examples of community ownership and movements. Soul Fire Farm, a community farm in the US dedicated to ending racism and food injustice was one example. Movements in Mozambique and Bolivia were also cited.

Josina and Kwesi see this movement as a potentially inclusive one. They described the 'three acres and a cow' demands in 1880s England as a history for land reform that could be drawn upon to build a multiracial narrative campaign. Climate change, which is causing land loss and increasing climate migration, will bring new challenges to how we understand



land and ownership. Land and climate justice must be connected movements. Equally, indigenous rights must be central to calls for reparatory justice.

**Zahra Bei on Reparatory justice with Josina Calliste and Kwesi Shaddai**

*From land to love, what does reparatory justice mean and how can we apply this framework across different campaign spaces?*

I think about reparations a lot - A LOT - which is why I was looking forward to being part of Josina and Kwesi's session on Reparatory Justice at the convening.

The session began with a remarkable image playing on a familiar (for myself) payment notice. It read 'WE ACCEPT REPARATIONS', accompanied by allusions to the various methods by which these funds could be sent.

Participants seemed to appreciate the image, and for me it brought into the space a demystifying and practical element to demanding and receiving reparatory justice.

Josina and Kwesi continued by outlining their understanding of the term 'reparations' which I always find useful in setting a baseline for discussion.

Content in the session invited contributions from people in the room who are currently active in land justice struggles. The main conversations that stood out for me were around distinguishing features of the position

of people and our relations to land - and thus differences in land reparation struggles - in the USA and UK contexts.

Some material also complimented discussions from earlier in the week - for example queries on supplementary schools in the UK responded to by information on Queen Mother Moore Supplementary School in South London.

I found many points of departure for personal research throughout the session, from information such as:

- There has been an established movement for black supplementary schools in the UK
- There was a World Conference of Racism in 2001, at which slavery and colonialism were officially declared crimes against humanity
- The Bridgetown Protocol outlines an expansive framework for reparatory justice
- An introduction to the struggle for land reparations in various contexts (USA, UK, Mozambique, Zimbabwe)
- It is deliberately made difficult and expensive to investigate land ownership in the UK. The University of Oxford owns too much of this land.
- Land In Our Names (LION) are disrupting systemic land justice issues, preparing to launch in January 2020

# WE ACCEPT



**ReParations**





Since attending a workshop on communism at Nyansapo (an afrofeminist festival in Paris, organised by Mwasi Collective), I have begun to think more intensely about what it could look like for reparatory justice to be practised in (or in preparation for) communist societies. I feel these considerations were spoken to with an example of recent independence struggles, which called for progressive land rights laws resulting in community rather than private ownership. In some ways, it could have been interesting to develop on what 'ownership' of land - leading away from a capitalist structure - could look like for black people.

I found the session very informative, thought and action provoking, focussing largely on land reparations in a presentation format. As with all the sessions at the convening, it feels tempting to desire a whole day or week focusing on the topic of 'Reparatory Justice'. It could be interesting to see if/how this could be translated into a more interactive/participatory

workshop-style session, inviting us to hear and learn from more people in the room - including around land struggles in their own contexts, which could help to connect some dots in the work towards our collective liberation.

I am driven to explore land justice further following this session, and aim to keep track of the key dates for the movement helpfully signposted by Josina and Kwesi. It has stimulated me to think more of ways reparations can be brought into public consciousness as a tool for honouring the wellbeing of black people, and strategies for demanding aspects of reparations from governments (in my particular context, the UK government). This session has also been part of a stimulation for me to seek and receive reparations in my own personal life.

# Healing

The KIN convening held space for healing and rest. This is an embodiment of KIN's values: love, compassion and joy. Two sessions were dedicated to healing, the *Shona ritual* led by Skye Chirape and *Movement and Mutual journeying* with Danielle Williams.

## **Teju Adisa Farrar on *the Shona ritual* led by Skye Chirape**

Healing is not a luxury, but a necessity in movement building. For all people—but especially black people and people of African descent—lived trauma, generational trauma and ancestral trauma inform and affect our capacity to build power. Skye Chirape's Shona Ritual gave us the space for radical catharsis, to release feelings, and free ourselves so that we could make room for collaboration. As the last workshop of Saturday, Skye created an uncolonial cleansing circle in which we did not have to perform, analyze or strategize—only be present and release.

Skye conducted this ritual in her native Shona language, using English only intermittently to give us instructions and ensure we felt

comfortable with the tactile parts of the ritual, which included washing each other's hands. Although many of us did not understand the words Skye was saying, we understood the purpose of her vocalizations and oration. Not fully understanding requires vulnerability, as does building trust when doing the work of creating alternative futures and transnational solidarity. While vulnerability is often seen as a weakness when working in social justice and social change, Skye's ritual reminded us that softness can be power as long as it knows when to defend itself from attacks. Skye's ritual reminded us that we need to rest and access our softness sometimes, rather than constantly being on guard waiting to react and fight back.

During the session we were encouraged to look inward, which is something organizing often doesn't allow space for. Looking inward is so crucial to thinking about the best way we can uniquely contribute to organizing alongside our communities because it helps to acknowledge our positionality and blindspots. The looking inward that occurred from Skye's



session encouraged us to release doubt, embrace fear and remember why we are doing the work we are doing. The phrase *ubuntu* comes to mind: *I am because we are*. We do this work for our communities, for society, for the world... and for ourselves. Skye reminded us that often what we are trying to heal and change in the world is what we are trying to heal within ourselves.

Skye provided a womb for us to heal within ourselves by releasing emotions and embracing the varied feelings that came to and through us. Ritual is resistance; ritual can be a type of reparation we give to ourselves. We have to repair within ourselves, within the African Diaspora community, heal within—in order to most effectively disrupt the oppressions that happens in our societies. Skye's Shona Ritual was a reminder, a holder of, all of these things.

### **Brandon Sturdivant on *Movement and Mutual Journeying with Danielle Williams***

We sat in a circle, black people from all over the diaspora, South Africa, Mozambique, Switzerland, Nigeria, United States, the UK and set about the moment to heal. It began with water. We passed it around, cleansing our spirits; some lightly dampening their fingers in the water, while others fully dipped and caressed their hands, letting the water wash white supremacy from our midst. We came to this place to heal, to radically love our black selves. I called in my ancestors as I often do in silent ceremonies to sit with me. But in this moment, our aim was to heal through music and movement.

Standing to our feet we moved through a series of songs and unguided movements. We let our bodies express themselves as they wish. The way we do when we are caught in emotion, in deep joy or sorrow. The first song was melodic, smooth. I remember feeling the elegance of the black bodies around me, the dignity that emanated. Some stretched, others

lay about twisting and turning, offering the universe, the creator, our ancestors praises and blessings. Without looking I could sense our collective shape in its tranquility. I thought, together we are safe.

We went through a series of songs, each one a connection to the diaspora, slightly elevating the pace as we walked the room free to be, in a word, black, in all our fullness and perfection.

Suddenly the pace changed, Kendrick Lamar's "Alright" blared through the speakers. It's one of my favorite songs as it connects me to found memories of organizing, of fighting to free our people. But hearing it in this context was different, sharing the lyrics with black people from different continents and different experiences but the same expression of black joy, feeling all of our bodies as we pounded our fists jumped in place and engaged in that sway, you know the rhythmic sway of those from the diaspora that instantly connects to a beat... I felt weight lifting. I believed the words when I said them. If black people can be together like this "we gon' be alright!"

I don't remember the last song, but I remember what it gifted. My diasporan loved ones and I slowed our pace, many of us allowed the ground to hold us as we sat or lay down allowing the sound to wash over us. Without touching ourselves we held one another, we allowed ourselves to be, to exist, to connect, to heal. As the music moved to a close, and I rose to my feet, I felt lighter. The body language of my comrades seemed a bit bouncier. The room is more spacious, freedom for people, more possible. And the shame I carry, unnecessary.

black pain is for public consumption, yet there are few places where black people can publicly heal. Outside of BOLD and TMLP, I rarely get that opportunity. I am forever grateful for Kinfolk.

# KIN closing session

by Zahra Dalilah

The 2019 KIN convening was only made possible by the myriad of people who, months and years before we all found ourselves in that room in Manchester sat in a circle preparing to say our goodbyes, had opened up a conversation about what magic could happen if you brought together activists and organisers from different movements, different countries and different walks of life to share. Share food, share stories, share ideas, share best practice. This idea became a team of people, this team of people grew, shrank, mutated, this team produced events, small, big, long short.

After years of this one idea, months of planning this one event, weeks of last minute additions, changes of plans, and days spent together in this cold English city; how could we possibly honour the journeys - emotional, physical, spiritual - of those in that room as well as those who were not in that room but who were indispensable in making it what it was?

In facilitation we speak of 'closing the space' as an equally key part of the process as 'opening the space'. These are terms used which speak to the intentionality with which we hope to enter and exit the meeting spaces. It is not just that we want to be together for a fleeting time and each present about the work - we come with the intention of connection, resonance, gratitude, growth and appreciation. As organisers and curators of the space we set this time aside to heed to these intentions, so that we are not only immersed in the content of the themed sessions but that we are also cognisant of the journey as we keep making our along it.

Time - it was true on this day - was not on our side during our last hour together as the tyranny of the clock threatened the sanctity of the space we shared, the encroaching thought of trains and flight times pushing people's minds out of the space, the rustling and crumpling disruption of those slipping out just in time.



Nevertheless, close the space we did. Sat in a circle, we each shared our gratitude and explored the ways we had been changed or been different in the space we had created together. Tears flowed as we recalled and celebrated those who weren't able to attend the convening, blocked by visas, those who had worked tirelessly behind the scenes, those who had come and offered their whole selves to the space, who were walking away with new friends, a feeling of family conjured and siblings in the struggle all eager to see where solidarity can manifest across all of the work that we do.

The closing session was no more or no less than the only way to close a space held with the intention of fostering connection and basking in a jubilant love of all our selves and our collective self. Facilitators [which is what all of KIN's founders are] are always adamant that these times and moments must exist, and each time we carve out time and space to reckon with the magic we make - it is an apt reminder of why.

## **Recommendations: What are our needs and who can support them?**

The KIN convening achieved most of its key objectives. It brought together people from across the diaspora and used video conferencing where possible to circumvent visa restrictions. Translation was used when needed. Three out of the four topics were discussed over the weekend: migration, incarceration and climate justice. The rise of the far-right was discussed as a contextual challenge to liberation. However, it was not a recurrent topic as the others were.

The convening raised a number of reflections, principles and actions that can guide future work by the KIN collective.

**Principles:** interrogating privilege, recognising difference, sharing knowledge and building solidarity

- The legacies of Western imperialism has created hierarchies of power within the diaspora globally and locally. To build a global liberation movement, it is imperative this difference in power and privilege is acknowledged and understood.
- Access to technology and funding can affect the distribution of solidarity efforts, with more attention on Anglophone and European countries. Solidarity must be active and focus outside of their immediate community.
- Philanthropy from Western countries can dictate what is prioritised in the African diaspora.
- Not all knowledge is directly transferable but it is imperative that it is shared. The global movement should facilitate this sharing of knowledge (for example political education), tailoring it as much as possible to the different countries and cultures represented within the African diaspora.
- Solidarity can be developed by sharing experiences, struggles and successes across borders. The space for meaningful connection across diaspora can be informative and healing.
- Political organising needs to have meaningful inclusion of LGBTQIA people. Intersex people should be at the centre of black liberation not only when dispelling gender binaries.

### **Recommendations**

- Activists should send resources to groups outside of their immediate context if they have the means to.
- Activists should promote the messages of black struggles outside of their context to new audiences. KIN should facilitate communication and connection between network members by sharing other's work and support needs.

- KIN should facilitate the co-production of common objectives and shared goals across countries that are mindful of power and privilege to support the development of a global movement. However, these movements should remain decentralised and localised.
- KIN should continue to hold space for healing and joy for members of the African diaspora.
- If financially viable, future convenings should be held in other parts of the African diaspora.

### Topics for further discussion

- How can a larger campaign to raise awareness of the use of data for the surveillance of bodies that are gradually being rolled out? How can we reclaim ownership of our data?
- How can we increase financial literacy in the diaspora, including new currencies, new markets resulting from 'drug'

decriminalisation and rotating savings and credit association (pardner, rounds, susu), without exacerbating extraction and exploitation?

- How could an independent philanthropic network be developed to support movements for black liberation?

### **Cidia Chissungu on *How now should I live?***

Three days would never be enough to think and rethink about our existence as people and its meaning in a context of inequality and structural racism. Although we are always doing this, even unconsciously, oftentimes we face challenges for the simple fact of having the skin colour more or bright, while often our siblings are not benefiting from the same rights we have, which makes us forcibly call them privileges as many people can't have them. The world we are fighting for will allow people to live in peace and dignity without having to wonder 'what if the story was different?' Nonetheless, we can't change what happened in the past but now we have the great chance to write a new story with our own voices and most importantly, we can share them.



After sharing and learning experiences of several movements and organizations during the three days of sessions, it was clear how almost everyone felt the importance and responsibility in the work that we are all doing individually or as organisations. Needing to do much. To achieve more. To organise more and mostly to analyse, strategize and connect people's struggles.

In doing as much, is where we made reflections around the meaning of solidarity and how it could be effective between folks movements impacting in different countries and continents but connected with the same changelings. By the end, it became clear that we don't necessarily have to define everything but live it and give support when it's important and crucial. As many people face difficulties to get a simple VISA to attend very specific activities for Europe or other countries around the world, the discussions led us to think deeply about a way to support people when they need it. This support would be by sharing tips, providing letters or anything else that can improve people's experiences in getting VISAs.

Second, to achieve more it is essentially about going back to the story. Getting inspiration and creating spaces where people can share their own stories by making available resources within our movements and share programs opportunities where different people from different countries can have the chance to exchange experiences. Besides programme opportunities, job opportunities were also pointed out as a way to support people's struggle.

Lastly, to organize more and connect struggles, different ideas came up and the first one was the need to continue in touch by creating virtual spaces such as WhatsApp groups, Facebook groups and other platforms. But, even though it sounded like a good idea, the discussion, our previous experiences, tendentially reminded us that virtual spaces are great but face to face meetings are always better. At the same time we shouldn't be gathering all the time if we are not able to give life to what we agree on, deliver on our existing commitments, unless the aim of the gatherings are simply to share experiences and connect people struggles which is fine and effective as well, knowing one each other's work is more important than anything else.

For the next meetings, we thought that it was really necessary and important that others (people and organizations) could take the lead on organizing and as the main challenge is always financial resources, we agree that everyone with possibility could support with what they can/have and so that we make the organization of the gathering less hard for those who volunteer their selves to receive different movements/people in their countries.

After a month of the convening, it becomes more clear how important it was to not assume that only WhatsApp and Facebook would be enough as a space were we could move forward for next steps but at least we feel more closer and connected, still needing to think where and how we will meet again to once more learn and share about our work and experience as organizers.





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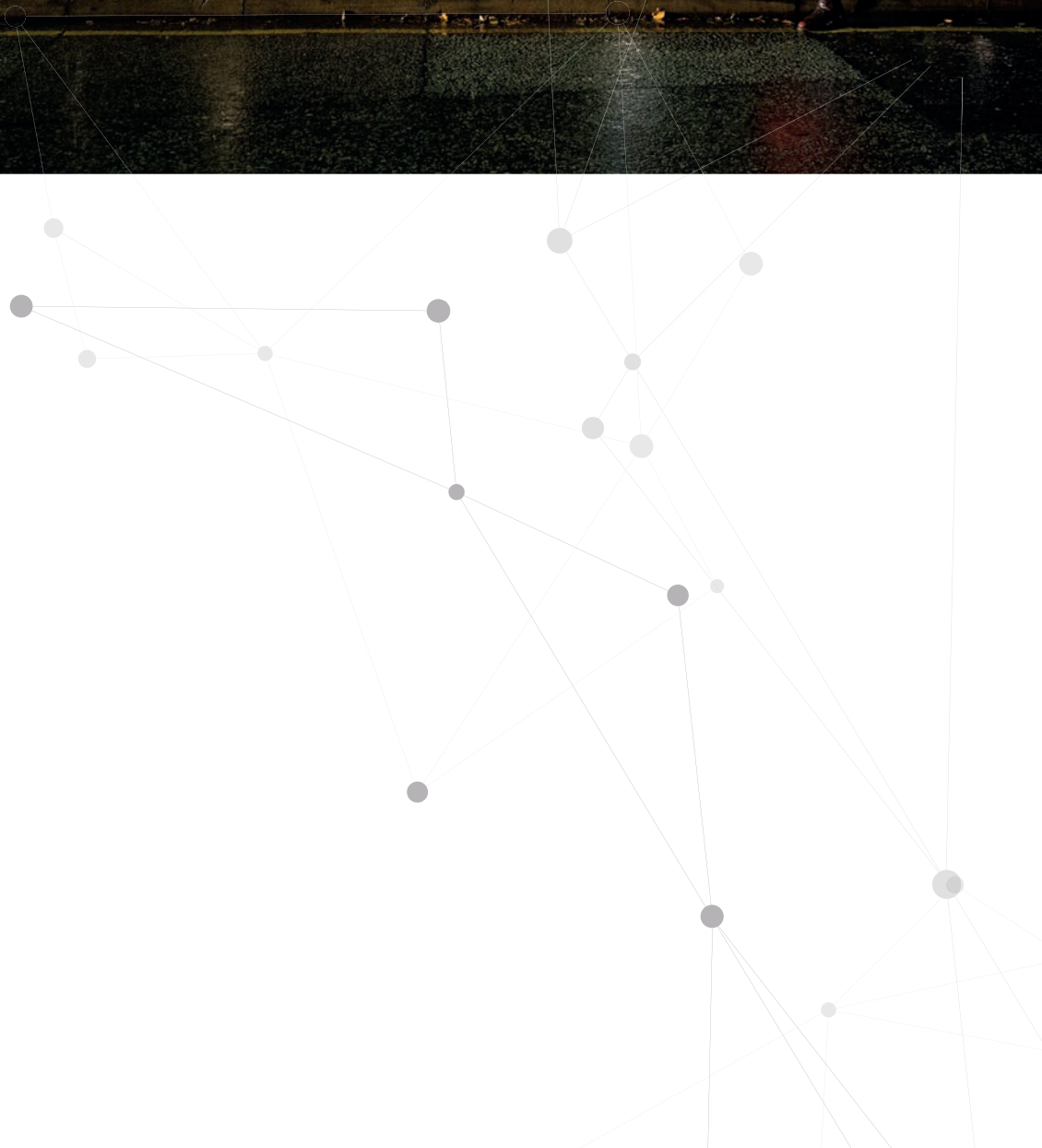
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