

# ubele Stories: Reflections on an Emerging Journey

**Empowering Black and Minoritised communities  
in the UK to act as catalysts  
for social and economic change**

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# Our Story

The Ubele Initiative was founded in 2014, following a series of dialogue sessions with African diaspora leaders, to find effective solutions to persistent social and economic issues in the UK. Community-rooted and collaborative in character, Ubele began to serve its purpose - building a sustainable and resilient future for our communities.

**Ubele is taken from Swahili meaning 'the future'.**

As an African diaspora led, infrastructure plus organisation, we believe in empowering Black and Minoritised communities in the UK to act as catalysts for social and economic change. To achieve this, we work with community leaders, groups, and organisations in the UK and beyond to strengthen their sustainability, resilience, and voice.

## **Our strategic objectives for 2021-2026:**

- Strengthen our communities through enterprise and asset development
- Advocate for equity and justice in our communities
- Strengthen our infrastructure and voice
- Develop our people, groups and organisations.

*Ubele Stories: Reflections on an Emerging Journey* is a compilation of selected blogs written over the past 3 years by Ubele staff and associates. These writings are a glimpse into our work, what we believe in and how we fulfil our mission. It's a space to reflect on and capture our experiences and learnings. Dive in and learn more about our racial justice work, intergenerational approach, supporting enterprise development within Black and Minoritised communities and Covid-19 response.

Visit **[www.ubele.org](http://www.ubele.org)** to find out more.

Follow us **[@ubeleinitiative](https://twitter.com/ubeleinitiative)**



**BOA ME NA ME MMOA WO**

**"Help me and let me help you"**

Symbol of cooperation and  
interdependence

Source: "Cloth As Metaphor" by G.F. Kojo Arthur



## Not waving but drowning

### A reflection on the Coronavirus pandemic

#### COVID-19

As the impact of the Coronavirus takes hold in London followed closely by the West Midlands and with the number of positive cases and death toll rising daily. I keep seeing images of the Titanic in my minds' eye which seems to be playing tricks with me, as I can clearly see this magnificent ship listing to the right with people falling off the top deck whilst trying to lower themselves down the ship's sides; people trapped in the 3rd class decks screaming for help and others in the water drowning – a lucky few people, both men and women, manage to scramble into the lifeboats before they are dropped into choppy waters crying as they see the unsinkable ship begin to go down. The famous sentence from the Stevie Smith's poem seems a fitting title for this piece.

When a friend of mine asked me where I was in the picture, this global tragedy comes into even sharper focus. I see myself and my Ubele Initiative colleagues attempting to throw a few lifebuoys to hundreds of sinking Black and Minority ethnic organisations.

Most miss their target as people and organisations drown, not because, as the common jokes goes, Black people can't swim, but because despite their

best efforts the odds were stacked against them; they were already weighed down before the tragedy hit – weighed down with the burden of trying to offer much needed community-based services and support yet overlooked by those secure in their wealth.

After the heady days of the 70s to 90s when 'race equality' and 'anti-racist' initiatives were both part of the main course on a 'first class' menu, the following 20 years saw a more palatable diet of diversity and equality being introduced, washed down with neo-liberalism, competitive commissioning as well as austerity measures. The net effect was a seriously weakened third sector and as with the survival of the fittest (or in the case of the Titanic), those who started off with the most privilege we're more likely to survive.

The Coronavirus has seen the whole sector hit the iceberg head on (and the Government offer of £750m to the charity sector falls woefully short of the £3.4bn needed it will inevitably pit groups against each other). A recent article by the Runnymede Trust succinctly outlines the impact on Black and Minority communities – it will

amplify and deepen existing inequalities in health, education, housing etc. Research completed by Karl Murray (April 2020) cites research that shows some 30% of people infected with the Coronavirus in the UK are from BAME communities.

**Black and minority ethnic organisations (even those which have operated over the past 20 years) seem like old barges starved of new investment and now find themselves shattered into pieces and sinking.**

They were starved of investment to help transform into the new shiny ships that were being built in urban as well as rural spaces across the UK. Ubele's ongoing research into the impact of Covid-19 shows struggling BAME organisations without even a lifebuoy to keep them afloat. Those few surviving organisations (many which have been in existence for up to four decades) have ended up rudderless without a clear steer as survival has - in some instances their very missions are a drift. To rescue the BAME third sector, locally, regionally and nationally, we need more than lifeboats – we need a refit; a strong keel, a new rudder for a new direction, an anchor to ride the current and future storms.

Disasters create a myriad of tragic stories – stories of death, bereavement, families in crisis, food shortages, isolation, loneliness, technological challenges – this list goes on. However, they can also create Phoenix like opportunities. The current crisis sheds an unforgiving light on funders'

persistent under-investment in the BAME sector (which is being unflinchingly challenged by groups such as Charity So White and their Call to Action). Consequently, the BAME sector is fractured and somewhat disorganised, raising fundamental questions about infrastructure support needs, today and in the future.

We hope to be able to lower a few dinghies and save more of our target group over the crucial weeks and months ahead. We have been proactive in response, not only undertaking practical research amongst the BAME community nationally but through launching new initiatives. In addition to the research to identify needs and clarify priority actions to support BAME communities, we are developing a raft of support measures. However, when life returns to some semblance of normality, we need to have an honest and open national conversation about what the BAME sector should look like and what we need to do to make this happen. We need to campaign for a 20-year strategy and the financial investment required to deliver it.

The sinking of the Titanic taught the whole world important lessons. The Covid-19 pandemic could offer all of us a chance for real transformational change. How we navigate the next few weeks and months will determine whether the iceberg will break us or make us; it's not too late for us to work together to change the ending of this fast unfolding story.

**Yvonne Field**  
**April 2020**

# COVID-19 has robbed us

## COVID-19

COVID-19 has robbed us – not only on account of the lives lost, but it has also stolen our traditional symbolic end of life rituals, experiences and celebrations.

During the first wave of the pandemic, the media was full of stories and imagery of the Black, Asian and Minoritised Ethnic health care workers who were dying disproportionately from the virus. This time around there is still ethnic disproportionality, but what we are hearing is of regular people from the Black and Asian community losing their lives to the virus. It seems as though everyone knows somebody who has succumbed to the virus, and in our Ubele family we have members who are now bereaved.

During the first wave in April last year, Dame Jocelyn Barrow died at the age of 90. Due to COVID-19 restrictions the community were not able to mark her passing with the pomp and pageantry she deserved. She did not get the grand send off and public celebration of her life that someone of her societal standing merited. She was amongst many things the first Black Woman to be Governor of the BBC, and she was the Founder and Deputy Chair of the Broadcasting Standards Committee.

COVID-19 meant no nine-nights communal expression of grief for Dame Barrow. There was no public gathering to give condolences to the family, to share fond memories, individual stories and anecdotes of her life.

There was no loud or tuneless singing of hymns, gospel songs and calypsos, neither was there any raucous laughter, the playing of dominos and cards, no wafting of aromatic smells and the love, joy and delight that accompanies the communal eating and drinking that is the tradition of Caribbean bereavement.

Instead, I had the heart-wrenching experience of my first virtual live streamed funeral – just me in solitude on my laptop in the living room watching what looked like CCTV camera footage of her service. There was not even another face visible on the zoom call to make public affirmations of her important relationship to the community.



As I write this my eyes are now leaking and there is a gnawing in my stomach as I reminisce about my beloved friend who recently succumbed to the virus.

Those of us to know and love him have not been able to come together to celebrate his life, to grieve communally, to hug and comfort each other, to offer a tissue to wipe away the tears, and share in an explosion of multisensory stimulation.

You see, were it not for COVID-19, we would have gathered together listening to his favourite music, singing soca, reggae, and folksongs. There would have been animated banter, sharing humorous and heartfelt stories, reminiscing about his antics and escapades, discussing his sometimes controversial Facebook posts, watching old photos, and eating from a table laden with sumptuous food that delights and stimulates the senses – all representative of the cultures of the people who would have come together in his memory.

COVID-19 has robbed us not only of those we love, but it has robbed us of our comforting, soothing healing symbolic rituals of mourning and acceptance. It has affected the way in which we come together to celebrate the life of our loved ones, of having companionship in the public acknowledging of bereavement, of the ability to be united in grief, and being able to hold and comfort each other to buffer the pain of loss.

What that means is that our traditional rituals are being reframed and as we grieve, mourn and experience the sadness of the loss of lives, the sobering thought is that even though the process is not happening the way that we are used to, it is evolving and we will adapt.

**Dr Yansie Rolston**

**February 2021**

COVID-19





## Football hit home

In the wake of a wave of violent racism, after England lost the Euro 2020 final - we want to extend our empathy to the players affected and to all those triggered by the reports of abuse. For every young person who saw themselves in Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho, Bukayo Saka in that moment, and are probably still feeling the pain of the news: we stand by you.

Ubele staff and people across the sector and country are unfortunately, yet again, not surprised. Let's highlight one tweet, that was so accurately summarised by footballer Tyrone Mings; what the present reality is for any anti-racist programming in football to try and prevent such harm:



Credit: Twitter/@OfficialTM\_3

Priti Patel and the Conservative leadership of this country, all co-signed The Sewell Report to deny that racism exists, despite the stark realities brought forward by the Black Lives Matter movement last year. Yet here we are again, saying the same thing, the same thing being denied at the highest level. We reiterate, again, we #RejecttheReport and call on Priti Patel, Boris Johnson and the Conservative administration to take accountability for the racism they deny and perpetuate. Any efforts for anti-racism by corporate bodies like The Football Association - can be immediately undermined in the denial of racism by the UK government. This abuse did not come "from abroad" as some spokespeople are suggesting- it is endemic and inherent in the UK and British Football culture that we can't deviate or distract ourselves from.

At Ubele, we convened an impromptu staff-led conversation to ask the question: if this is happening at the international league level - what could be said for people at a local level? What is happening in community teams or in communities surrounding stadiums?



Some people shared their memories and present life realities of engaging with football and football culture as Black people. By sharing some here and with each other, our intention is to lift silence on our collective stories at a local level and keep in mind, this reality does not just affect premier league professional footballers alone. Trigger warning: racial abuse.

“My Black working class family lived in Deptford, adjacent to Bermondsey. Millwall was our nearest football club. When Millwall played at home, we were made to lie low and stay at home; their local and national notoriety as an overtly racist club, with supporters chanting “we are racist and we don’t care” reinforced by attacks by local skin-heads... later on as a result of National Front and British National Party (BNP) marches and further attacks.

I felt real fear as a child. My freedom was curtailed by the knowledge that there was danger just around the corner – that we could be severely beaten, even killed, by mob culture, because of the colour of my skin.”

“I am from a family of footballers in Liverpool and my dad was semi-pro 50 years ago. I have heard loads of stories of racist abuse being hurled at my dad and other Black players, then my brother – who was also a keen footballer a generation later.

In my Dad’s days it was kind of expected, but he always says that because he was such a good footballer the fans were largely ok! The abuse he got was from other teams from areas where there were no Black people. In media reporting from the time, he is always referenced as one of two great ‘coloured boys/players’.”

“As a young teen, I was told my cousin of mixed heritage, had been banned from football for life as a teenager! A referee called them a stupid black b\*\*\* and they reacted by headbutting him. I remember feeling quite confused that they were so severely punished for their actions with a lifetime ban, for refusing to apologise to the referee. The referee got away with the verbal abuse. [...]”

— “ —

*“I always think what a great athlete they could have become. If this were to happen today, I wonder if the end result would be any different? We currently have a few young players in the family who wish to play professionally in the future, my hope is that by the time they do (they would be around the same ages as Saka, Rashford and Sancho) the experiences of the past few days will be a thing of the past. We hope.”*

The Good News: people are speaking out and we are seeing a spotlight on racist abuse in football in ways that we haven't seen at this level. This morning, we felt a small sense of relief to see other famous figures speaking out on this topic and actually hearing white celebrities take ownership and admit to the truth of racism in football.

We know, sport has the power to influence. Sportsmanship, are values that Black and minoritised communities know a lot about.

This piece is a reminder that racism is systemic and it doesn't appear to have gone anywhere, we are dubious anything will happen overnight. We know this is also evident at a local level where there are less cameras and media attention. It is just as important.

Saka, Rashford and Sancho most certainly have had their setbacks, but let them serve as a reminder for young people of what is possible despite hate. To those who are striving for dreams people may have told you weren't possible, or made you feel as though you weren't welcome - we want to remind you that it is all possible. Working on your talents, playing to your strengths, aiming high and being the excellence you are; can't ever be stopped by hate.

**July 2021**

# Announcing the Harakati project

The Ubele Initiative is launching Harakati, a new project to explore opportunities to strengthen and expand the infrastructure that supports anti-racism movements in the UK. The name “Harakati” for this project is derived from the word “movement” in Swahili and Arabic.

The profound changes of the last year have dramatically shifted the landscape of anti-racist action. We’ve seen how social movements have the power to fundamentally reshape public discourse and catalyse mass action. Past and current experiences may lead us to worry that these gains will be short-lived, undermined and co-opted. This is exactly why we feel it’s necessary to look at the role of infrastructure, as one of many inputs and support systems that underpin and sustain racial justice work.

This seems especially important now. More people are engaging, new groups are being established and existing groups are elevating their ambitions. What are the underlying support systems that can meet the evolving scale, depth and complexity of racial justice work?



## GROUNDING THIS PROJECT: KEY DEFINITIONS

### Racial Injustice

We often hear about ‘racial justice’ as part of the work people do. What we will communicate in this research, is that we actually currently exist in a state of ‘racial injustice’. As it stands in the UK: there has not been legal or political justice, reparations, retribution or State recognition of Black and minoritised people and their history, including how and why they experience the legacy of the British Empire to this day.

The result of this is historic financial underinvestment, health disparities, housing disparities, ethnic cleansing, and murder. An example: the case of Mark Duggan and the disproportionate number of Black people who have died

in custody of the criminal justice system, police brutality, asylum centres and more; has yet to be brought into any kind of justice by the State. Therefore, we presently exist in a state of 'racial injustice' in the UK.

Until there has been any significant legal change or even State recognition of global atrocities including the enslavement of Black people by the UK government; that continues to perpetuate injustice to this day, the work of 'racial justice' can't be brought by just Black and minoritised people, nor anyone working in the voluntary, social enterprise or civil society sector, alone. We also know, anti-racist work throughout the UK across all sections, is what disturbs this state of injustice, in the pursuit of racial justice.

### **Anti-racism**

The first thing to acknowledge when defining this concept is that there is a distinct difference between 'non-racist' and 'anti-racist' (1). In making the proclamation that something is anti-racist, we acknowledge this is best measured by action to intentionally obstruct, resist and dismantle the oppressive structure of institutional, systemic, historic and deeply entrenched existing racism. It is not just an approach, feeling, intention or even opinion of opposition to racism. Often anti-racism is confused with 'non-racism' — which has a different result.

Non-racist (which is a preoccupation with stressing what something is not, as opposed to what it is) often results in generally maintaining the status quo with little to no interruption.

An anti-racist organisation; involves constant and consistent de-centring, de-platforming and deconstructing of whiteness to instead, centre the needs and voices of Black and minoritised people, history and experiences throughout every level (top and bottom) of the organisation. It would definitely not stay neutral or ambiguous whilst engaging with politics, campaigning and advocacy; it might clearly communicate racist outcomes as an active present state, recognise it is history (not just individuals alone) that contribute to where we are now; taking and demanding accountability at every stage with the redistribution of power.

In this project, while taking a broad view of movements that are anti-racist, questions we ask ourselves include; how does one ensure that specific agendas, like anti-Black racism, aren't subsumed or depoliticised? Or, how can anti-Black racism be centred to take an intersectional approach within other forms of anti-racist organising? In considering intersectionality (coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (2)) — we interrogate with this lens to observe where power differentials exist within and across anti-racist movements, which voices are being overpowered, how issues and agendas interlink and what their relationship might be with each other.

For example, who is more likely, or less likely, to benefit from broader economic, social and environmental justice movements?

## HOW WE ARE ORGANISING THIS PROJECT AND WITH WHOM

The ideas emerging from this project will be developed and tested through a participatory process of dialogue. We'll be holding 1:1 interviews with a small group of people — those who are current or potential users of infrastructure and those with experience providing it. We know Black and minoritised people and organisations are currently "over consulted" and overstretched so we will be utilising the existing literature and resources available to capture their insights and experiences, and keeping interviews to a minimum. We'll also be holding workshops to have collective discussions around the emerging findings.

We'll be convening an Advisory Group to act as a sounding board and to provide strategic insight and expertise. Ultimately, being in dialogue with the Advisory Group and being informed through the different layers of engagement, we should be able to consider a wide range of movement actors.

The two funders of the project — Lankelly Chase and Joseph Rowntree Charitable Foundation — will also join the Advisory Group (they'll be two out of ten members in total).

An overarching principle is to cultivate trust throughout our relationships in an equitable way, to avoid playing out dynamics caused by an imbalance of power, perpetuated by an existing funding system.

Therefore, we have been deliberate in our selection of the Advisory Group to ensure that the majority are individuals actively working on the ground in anti-racist organisations, groups and movements.

## INTENDED OUTCOMES: SHORT-TERM AND BEYOND

Our outcome is to produce a resource of what we're learning and sharing the ideas that have emerged in October 2021. We don't see this research as casting anything in stone, rather, one step in an iterative process. We hope it will provide space and inspiration to think creatively and spaciouly about what specific forms of infrastructure are needed to secure a sound footing for anti-racist movements for future generations. Therefore, the audience for this research encompasses a spectrum of anti-racism groups, movements, organisations, individual activists, funders and national agencies.

As a long-term outlook for this work; the two funders involved in this exploratory phase have expressed a strong commitment to supporting the recommendations that emerge from this project and support for what comes next — though it's too early to define the extent and direction of future funding. We are also aware that other funders may be prepared to support some aspects of what emerges from this project.



Our goal for this research and development phase is to produce tangible, concrete and actionable recommendations that will strengthen, support and benefit the anti-racist activists, organisers, collectives and movement in the UK.

In conclusion, Kimberlé Crenshaw's work on intersectionality will be a particularly useful lens for us to utilise in researching how to sustain anti-racist movements, activists and collectives across the UK to continue to challenge toxic whiteness and power. In order to do this, we are staying curious, open and honest about what is working well as well as honouring where voices need to be heard and listened to. In addition to our Calls to Action to funders to direct funds to Black and minoritised infrastructure bodies in the Booska Paper, we now ask what and how these groups need to be supported in order to sustain and direct attention to social and racial justice.

**August 2021**

[1] This definition has been adapted from Are you racist? 'No' isn't a good enough answer — Marlon James, published by The Guardian.

[2] Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." University of Chicago Legal Forum 1 (8): 139–67.

# Sharing reflections of Ubele's community of practice



Who is the woman who attends a community practitioner conference in South Africa where she is the only person of colour amongst the delegates and pledges there, that she is going to find a way to create opportunities for people of colour to attend overseas conferences?

Who is the woman who invests a significant proportion of her life looking into her community with a heart that desires to see men and women, young and old have opportunities to create and sustain the creation of their own wealth?

Who is the woman who from an early age believed she could be an entrepreneur and that she could support others to become entrepreneurs?

Who is the woman who sees a need in her community for great leaders, identifies potential and makes an intentional attempt to invest in and connect people with expertise and experience? Who leads and contributes to the development of awesome, influential, transformational, community leaders who go on to make significant impact for racial and social justice in their communities and places of employment?

Who is the woman who has the skills and ability to select and connect talent from all parts of Africa, the Caribbean, bringing those hearts, minds, passions, and compassion to infuse, inform, create, and fulfil her vision of building community wealth and strong leadership?

Which ordinary Black woman can gather the old, the aging, the mid lifers, the youth, and children in one context with one vision to make the world and especially the lives of people of colour in our world a better place?

You may say such a woman does not exist. You may say she only exists in dreams. You might even call her a dreamer, and that is exactly what she has always been. If there are no dreams, then, there are no dreams to transition to reality.

On August 14, 2021, I boarded a plane from Manchester UK to Heraklion, in Crete. By Monday August 16th, I was part of a team who converged under the umbrella of UBELE ready in minds, bodies, and spirits to immerse themselves in a strategic development planning week.

Amongst those in the room were: historians, strategists, academics, project leaders, project developers, financiers, educators, entrepreneurs, consultants, play writers, directors, actors, authors, mental health experts, artists, researchers, community activists, cultural horticulturalists, breathing experts, bid writers, strategic planners, and visionaries. Who knows the number of languages that were represented in the room and the centuries of collective professional experience and expertise represented there?

Each day the 20+ members convened to undertake a range of activities under the guidance of the Greek facilitator Markos Perrakis, supported by the UK lead, Michael Hamilton. Each day the rooms were be filled with passion and wisdom and for the most part, there was an absence of explicit ego and hierarchy. The days were filled with exploration of ideas, sharing, challenging, phrasing, and rephrasing. Of exploring and experimenting, of disagreeing without disappearing.

No, don't misunderstand me, I wouldn't like to mislead you. Of course, there are differences in opinions and different suggestions for approaches. This group was not perfect, they were human and humane. They were passionate, and they were committed. What was refreshing was that within the spaces all the differences were as welcomed as the areas of commonality and where appropriate, timely compassionate challenges were offered to support rethinking, deeper thinking, and reflection. The group worked hard with dedication and commitment as a community of practice who wanted to be, the best they could be, in supporting local black and people of colour communities to thrive. Whilst at the same time, themselves been strategically positioned to challenge and disrupt the systems practices and structures within institutions that were socially and racially inequitable.

In 2020 following the global lens on Black Lives through 'Black Lives Matter' and 'Asian Lives Matter' and with the current issues in Afghanistan and Haiti and so many other countries all over our world this group of organisers did not lose sight of the importance of catering for the whole person, of providing for participants' health and well-being.



So, let's revisit the questions at the beginning of this piece:

**Which Black woman attends a community practitioner conference in South Africa where she is the only person of colour amongst the delegates and pledges there, that she is going to find a way to create opportunities for people of colour to attend overseas conferences?**

A stubbornly, committed, visionary one, born in South London to a fiercely activist mother. The woman who has since made multiple international educational trips a reality for intergenerational groups from the UK and beyond for the past years.

**Which Black woman invests a significant proportion of her life looking into her community with a heart that desires to see men and women, young and old have opportunities to create and sustain the creation of their own wealth?**

A formidable female, liberatory, activist and educator who refused and still refuses to be kept back or held down by systems, structures or behaviours that are racist, discriminatory, or oppressive.

**Which Black woman believes she could be an entrepreneur and that she could support others to become entrepreneurs, who has the skills and ability to select and connect talent from all parts of the world, but particularly, Africa, the UK, and the Caribbean. Who brings hearts, minds, passion, compassion knowledge, skills, and expertise to infuse, inform, contribute to the fulfilling of her vision?**

A woman who refused and still refuses to make dreams die. Not only her own, but those of her ancestors and the youth that are coming behind her, including those she will not see but in her ancestral role she 'feels' their dreams. An extraordinarily, ordinary woman who has made personal sacrifices to keep not only her dreams but the vision she has for her 'people' alive.

**Which Black woman can gather the old, the aging, the mid lifers, the youth, and the children in one context with one vision to make the world and especially the lives of people of colour in our world a fairer and better place?**

A woman with a gift that you could easily miss if you don't stop to stare. A woman who possesses no airs and graces, who lives within the human binaries of haves, and have nots, aged and young, gentle, and forceful, relaxed and intense, serious and fun, transforming what inequitable systems normalised, being disruptive in contexts less traveled by people and especially by women of colour.

Which Black woman sees a need in her community for great leaders, sees potential and makes an intentional attempt to invest in and connect people with great potentials as a result contributing to the development of an awesome, influential, transformational community of leaders who also make significant impact for racial and social justice in their places of employment?

That woman exists! I've met her. I have both worked with her and seen her at work. I stand in awe, though I know she wouldn't want me to. I'm done with waiting, procrastinating, and hesitating.

Stand with me please and salute: Madam, Yvonne Field - the dreamer whose dreams have and are coming through much less for her personally and much more, (if you belong to the black community or are an advocate for social and racial justice) for you, for me and the generations yet to be.

Thank you, Yvonne. We love, value, and appreciate you and we commit to aligning with you as part of the Ubele community.

**Peggy P. Warren**

**September 2021**







## Black Rootz and the journey to become the first Black-led growers enterprise

I was appointed by The Ubele Initiative to support the development of Black Rootz, a Black growers' collective, committed to Black empowerment and self-reliance who, collectively have over 100 years of organic food growing experience in their respective fields.

The group had been in existence for over 18 months when I got involved, and at the time had been experiencing growing pains, typical of start-ups during their development phase. I was warmly welcomed into the group, initially by Paulette Henry, the Black Rootz Co-ordinator then by Sandra, Junior and the rest of the group.

**Everyone had a story to tell and I was keen to listen.**

Some contained recollection filled with laughter, pain and disappointment but all had an unwavering commitment to see Black Rootz thrive and live up to its ideals to become the first Black-led social enterprise growing organic food

commercially, providing training programmes which engage young people and support the next generation of growers from Black communities, thereby creating employment and livelihoods.

Their stories revealed how conflicting strategic approaches, shifting priorities and the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted them negatively, resulting in the group losing direction and fragmenting.

The need to develop a Black-led growers' collective stems from a combination of individual, community and wider systemic needs, surrounding food security, sustaining livelihoods and the importance of Black and marginalised communities having control of critical community spaces and issues surrounding who owns the land and who's excluded or exploited by it.



The Black Rootz project grew as a response from Ubele and individual Black growers based at Wolves Lane Centre, who recognized the need to ensure that Black and minoritised growers reflect and represent the cultural diversity of the Borough of Haringey and the wider UK. My review, conducted over several months examine what had happened to date through a series of one to one interviews with current and previous members, and the examination of all relevant documentation produced since Black Rootz inception.

What I uncovered were beautiful stories interwoven with the Windrush generation migration to the UK, a generation invited by successive governments to relocate to Britain from their homes in the Caribbean to address the post-war labour shortages.

This generation would often want to grow food they were used to back home and many grew food in their own back yards as a means to combat food scarcity.

Yet, despite this rich legacy of food growing since the 1950s, there are no Black-led social enterprises growing organic food commercially. The first generation of UK Black growers is now aging, retiring, returning to their countries of origin or simply dying.

There is an urgent need for the establishment of a Black-led growers' enterprise to pass on traditional and practical growing skills which ensures that indigenous and local food growing knowledge are transferred to Black and minoritised growers and future generations of children and young people, thus securing a legacy.

**William Welch**

**April 2021**

# What is intergenerational working?

How will we, can we understand what is  
our true purpose  
Our brain is not even yet fully mature  
You expect us to fill some really big  
boots

Can't you see that we are still seeking,  
searching, growing

Help us, nurture us, guide us, show us  
love, care and compassion  
Embrace our inquisitiveness, be patient  
with our naivety  
Stop putting us down, stop blaming us,  
We are not the cause of all ills in society

Show us respect, that same respect that  
you demand of us  
We are not all thugs, we are not all in  
gangs  
We are not all layabouts, some of us have  
great plans

Plans to make a positive difference to  
society  
Plans to be the best that we can be  
Come speak with me, so you can  
understand my reality  
There is so much wrongs that together  
you, me, we need to put right

But you too have to take some blame,  
take a share of the responsibility  
Acknowledge that you have flaws, don't  
sugar-coating your past,  
Admit that at times you messed up too

Allow us freedom of expression, listen  
and hear our opinion  
Don't you realise when you impose your  
views on us, it's a form of oppression

We want to spread our wings, we want to  
emulate your vision  
We want to build upon the foundations  
We want to continue what the ancestors  
started

Believe it or not, one day we too will  
become the Elders  
That is a scary thought for someone so  
young, but that is the truth  
Share with us your books, your  
knowledge, your stories  
Walk with us along the way, and guide us  
when we falter

We know your journey has been tough  
Growing up as a child with no mobile  
phone, no Instagram, no snapchat  
It's hard for us to imagine life like that,  
Elders you all had it very rough

We salute you for all that you have done  
and continue to do  
An thank you for your inspiration and  
wisdom

**Dr Yansie Rolston**

**January 2020**



## Windrush Food Fest

### Imparting Windrush Generation wisdom

#### WINDRUSH GENERATION

I had the pleasure of attending Ubele's recent event Windrush Food Fest on 17th June 2019. I attended in the capacity of a volunteer, and while I did help a little where I could, I found myself so immersed in the food, events and people, that I became one of many participants.

**One highlight of the event was meeting 90-year-old Verona.**

She's a British Jamaican and part of Generation Windrush. Verona is around 90 years old, lives in a care home and has dementia. When I sat with her and asked her where she was born, she told me she couldn't remember and giggled.

But then a woman sat next to her, Nefertiti, started speaking to her in their local tongue, saying things like, "but if I say SWEET SOP, you kna what I'm talkin' 'bout right?" Verona's eyes lit up and a smile spread across her face.

"But if I say, NASEBERRY yakna what I'm talkin' 'bout right?". Verona turned to me bearing an even larger grin, muttered something in unintelligible English and started clapping with excitement. Through Nefertiti evoking old names, places and memories, Verona was able to remember her old life, to feel herself again in the present. THAT is something money can't buy. Pure, unadulterated happiness.

Monica, like Verona, is an elderly Jamaican woman who, while herself had not been on the Windrush, belongs to the generation of those British Jamaicans that migrated to Britain.

Sitting and speaking with her like nothing I've experienced before. In the space of an hour and a half she imparted to many home truths and wisdoms that will resonate with me for the rest of my life.





Not only did she encourage me to be more confident and take ownership of my life

"Sabah, ya gotta speak TRUTE into existence! Stop with the if this, if that!"

But she also told me to practice speaking Urdu, my mother tongue, more often.

Why? Because once you lose you're your culture, she told me, you lose everything. "We come from RICH countries yakna. Once you leave it for 'betterment' elsewhere you have been ROBBED of your birthright... right to our rich lands! Thanks to Monica's words, I've since made a greater effort to speak with my mother in our native language.

The Windrush scandal is an awful thing that happened to wonderful people. Meeting the likes of Verona and Monica and hearing their stories really humanised the plight of this generation. Thank you Ubele for marking, commemorating and celebrating such vibrant and beautiful cultures whose histories and identities political actors have attempted to erase. Offering a platform for the elderly and young people to mix and converse in a safe space was a great way for us to learn about their experiences and enrich our knowledge about this event in history.

In a time of heightened populism, identity politics and intolerance, may we continue to hail and champion each other's cultures!

Until next time,

**Sabah**

**July 2019**





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