

# Af Adolescents pod #3 final

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people, future, role models, stories, johnny, youth, question, hope, imagination, community, life, world, african, marcus rushford, talking, musicians, imagine, miko, building, person

## SPEAKERS

Elleke Boehmer

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**E** Elleke Boehmer 00:05

Hello, I'm Elleke Boehmer. And I'm happy to welcome you to this podcast on thinking the future from the accelerator club based at the Universities of Oxford and Cape Town. This recording was made on the fifth of January 2022. This is the third podcast in our second accelerate hub series on subjects related to intervention and acceleration in various African contexts, especially involving young people. And our project is funded by the Ukri GC RF. My name is Elleke Boehmer, and I'm co lead of workpackage. Three in the accelerate hub. I'm also a writer and a professor of world literature at the University of Oxford. And I'm very interested in storytelling as a form of intervention and as intervention. A quick word on the accelerate hub and how it relates to our topic today thinking the future future thinking. The accelerate hub goal is to improve outcomes for 20 million adolescents across the African continent in relation to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals SDGs. These outcomes have, of course, everything to do with the future, how we imagined it, how we shape it, what we use to shape it. So today's topic is very salient. And I'm really delighted to be joined today by three fantastic commentators whose work in different ways relates to futures thinking. They are all writers, and in their different capacities, genre breakers, and genre makers. Together, we will focus on young people and this all important question of how we face the future. How do we imagine it? Do we do so with hope? Or with fear and apprehension? What helps us hope? And what do we hope for? And how might we use storytelling to picture the future? I'll now introduce the three speakers very briefly, beginning in alphabetical order. And after that, I'll ask each one to say a word about themselves and their interests before we launch into the main conversation. Thank you so much. All three of you for joining us in this conversation today. I Lurker some is a Kenyan feminist storyteller, writer and performer. She is widely experimental. From Page to stage screen to Speaker micro fiction to memory poems. She loves to play with how people experience story. Her writing has been performed and published on multiple platforms and stages around the world from Nairobi to Kigali to Stuttgart. She is the A in the LAM la m sisterhood, a Content Studio that fills the world with stories for African women to feel and be seen, heard. And beloved, Macomb was Ender is a Zimbabwean journalist and writer, and Mandela Rhodes Scholar. She's written for publications including the Zimbabwe independent, the mail and guardian. This is Africa, and daily Maverick. McComas, and His work focuses on African current affairs, women, politics, youth development, leadership and governance. All topics of course with a strong future dimension. Johnny Steinberg's work explores everyday life

in South Africa, in a timespan stretching from later part age to the present. Among his books are a man of Good Hope, which looks at migration and xenophobia. And one day in Bethlehem, an exploration of the memory of a man who believes he was falsely convicted for murder. Johnny Steinberg has twice won South Africa's premier nonfiction prize, the Sunday Times Elon patient award and he was an inaugural winner of the Windham Campbell literature prizes. He teaches part time at Yale University in the United States, and he is a visiting professor at Weiser bovitz Institute for Social and Economic Research in Johannesburg, South Africa. He was professor of African Studies at Oxford University till 2020 la casa Macomb was and and Johnny Steinberg. You're very welcome today and I'd now like to turn to you briefly to say hi and And, and a line of introduction, please, beginning with LA.

 05:06

Hello, everyone. Thank you so much for that warm welcome. It's really lovely to be here. So, currently, a lot of my work is is focused on historical storytelling, looking back at the ways that we've been before in order to perhaps open up new possibilities for how we can be now and also into the future, especially around brazen African women.

 05:35

Thanks, Marco, Miko.

 05:39

Hi, everyone. It's very good to be here. And I'm looking forward to what promises to be a vibrant and interesting discussion. Just a small note on my work, you know, Ellika mentioned that I write on a range of various topics, but something I've always tried to do in my work and, you know, want to expand on in the future is looking at, you know, the big stories in the news headlines, but from the perspectives of, quote, unquote, ordinary people. So, you know, not the big names and politics or business, but the people who are usually the most impacted by some of these issues, but whose perspectives and experiences tend not to make it into the headlines?

 Elleke Boehmer 06:27

Thank you, Marco. And Johnny.

 06:30

Thanks. Hello, everybody. It's very good to be here. I guess one of my ambitions as a storyteller is to, to show that ordinary people and ordinary Africans in particular can be the subjects of complex morally ambivalence, powerful literature, as much as any 19th century bourgeois person in France or Russia, that the moral lives of ordinary people are as complicated, as Rich and as as difficult as anybody's.

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Elleke Boehmer 07:10

Thanks very much for those opening words. So turning now, to the conversation proper, what I'd like to do is to come to each of you in turn, and perhaps reverse the order. So beginning with Johnny, I'd like to come to each of you in turn, and ask you to say something about our topic today, which is how we imagine the future. How do we think about and set up goals and hopes for ourselves, especially in relation to young people on the African continent? So I'm thinking of, of young people who may not have many resources, who may feel cut off from opportunities due to where they live the circumstances of their lives? How do you do ordinary people as as as, as Johnny and Michael have already been saying, how do ordinary people in such contexts imagine the future in context perhaps of poverty and deprivation? How do we think about tomorrow? A big question, Johnny?



08:20

It's a very big question. And I hope I'm not cheating it by making it a slightly smaller one by taking example of one person. I mean, I always find that I learn so much about the people I write about and I would like to have a Bachelor of question through one person story who was the protagonist of my book, man of Good Hope, and very briefly, his name is Asad Abdullah him. He was born in Mogadishu civil war broke out when he was seven or eight years old in 1991. He fled was separated from his parents, and lived this incredibly itinerant childhood wandering around East Africa, making very hard tactical alliances with adults, always cautious, never attaching himself to anybody for too long, drifting. And finally, when he was 18 or 19 years old, he settled on the streets of Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, and began for the first time to have some silence in his life. He worked as a hustler. An intermediary between Somali immigrants and Ethiopians was finally earning a good stable living, medical and got married, was supporting many young men around him had really had a household was becoming an adult. And exactly at this moment, when he had some certainty, he packed up and left he put \$1,200 in his pockets. And as an undocumented, illegal migrants headed south towards South Africa, not knowing what he encountered on the journey, whether he'd survived the journey, and not really knowing what he'd find on the other ends. what he knew about South Africa is that stories that there are riches to be made. And actually that was puzzled. Why does the person do that at the very moment when they're settling at the very moment when they have some security. And it took spending a long time with that said, to try and get my best answer to that. And, and eventually, my interpretation of what he was doing was, it was precisely because he was settling that he understood that moment that if he didn't move, his life, when he died, would just be too close to his life when he was born, he wouldn't have done enough. And it really his ambition in life was to not just experienced the new, but to experience the uncertain to die in circumstances, he literally couldn't have imagined when he was a child. And more than that, know that because he was creating something new, the whole history of his lineage, the whole history of that apply, here's what changed because of what he did, in the short years that he was on this earth, therefore be changing the lives of children, grandchildren, great grandchildren forever, and a sense that he was a human being who left a mark on the world. And that was so interesting to me, because it suggested that for a sad to be a human being is a to take massive risks. And literally to risk one's life and ask the question of what one's life is worth? You know, is it worth heading to mortal danger in order to be something new? And it just struck me that for somebody like him, the future was about massive uncertainty, it was about the unimaginable. But it was worth going there. Even if one was

throwing dice, even if we end up in terrible trouble. And so it really taught me a sense of being human, which I hadn't quite confronted before. And I admired him for his bravery in living a life like that. And at times thought that he was recklessly courageous, not to.

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Elleke Boehmer 12:01

Thanks, Johnny's, gosh, there's so much there that, you know, I'd love to come back later about kind of always inviting an uncertain future of security and, and predictability if, you know, as a single path going forward. But I'd like to turn now to to Mako with this with this opening question of, of, you know, how do we go about opening up our future, especially in situations where we might not have many resources?



12:43

Um, well, I think the best way that I can answer that question is to talk a bit about my own personal journey, and like my change and perspective in regards to the future. So, you know, 2016 2015 2016 2017, we're key years that had like, specific milestones and events that really influenced my initial positive perspective on the future. So you know, 2015 was fitness for 2016 was FISMA, small again, but also the RU reference list protests at Rhodes university, you know, protesting against sexual violence, and 2017 was the November 2017, quote, unquote, coup in, in Zimbabwe. So, you know, coming out of those three events, I was very optimistic about the future. I was like, you know, African youth where we've demonstrated that we want to shape the world that we live in, you know, we want to be engaged, we have good ideas. We want to be active citizens and play an active role in shaping our societies, but also building the future, not just for us, but for future generations. And then 2018 and 2019 happened. And my perspective changed considerably. So I think that there were several factors that changed my perspective. So I'd say the big one was coming back home, so coming back home in terms of, you know, I started my master's programme back at Rhodes. So you know, I had to leave but then I'd come back for holidays. And when I left in the beginning of 2018, I was told that this you know, culture of hope, like things didn't change, or like long nightmares finally over. But whenever I would come home, the opposite was happening, things were getting progressively worse. And it really started to shift my perspective because as much as we wanted to participate, and as much as during my particular events, we were made to feel like we were partners. appealing. At the end of the day, we still had no agency. And we were still somewhat like passive objects in, you know, larger political, social economic schemes. And I think the second thing that really changed my perspective was just really looking at the data out, say, so in my time, as I'm Adela with scholar, but also, in a lot of my research as a student. And as a, as a journalist, as a writer, I really got to look at, you know, the statistics and the data and the personal stories of a lot of young Africans across the continent. And it shocked me, to be honest, I think the first thing that really shocked me was just how young This continent is, you know, the median age is 19.7. But if you look at the people that are in charge across different sectors, that's really not reflected. And the very specific needs and demands of those populations are not reflected either. Second of all, as much as things have improved, in terms of you know, digital access, and you know, just access to education and mobility, in many ways, things have stayed the same. And if not have gotten worse. So inequality has gotten worse, unemployment rates have gotten worse, the exact same thing like access to certain spaces and resources has gotten worse. So, you know, the future the how the way I envisage the future at

this point, is still cautiously optimistic. But increasingly, a pragmatic, I would say, and that in case, there isn't a concerted continental effort to really address a lot of the pressing issues that a significant part of Africa's population faces. The future is not looking very good.

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Elleke Boehmer 16:55

Thanks, Marco. So again, there's, you're talking there, which relates to Assad, who Johnny was talking about you, you're talking there about a quite a radical shift in imagining the future, in your case, from, you know, a sense of openness and optimism, to a sense of, because of circumstances and ways in which the future seems to crowd in or not allow possibility, and a sense of going forward. A move to to pragmatism, again, there's so much there to pick up a layer, if we could turn to you about this question of yeah, this opening question, asked me, how do we begin to imagine the future as young people?



17:50

Thanks, Ellie, Ken. I mean, I think first of all, really, it should be a young person answering this question and not me. But I it's, it's, it's a big question to ask the future is a big word. It's, it can be abstract and amorphous, and can feel so out of one's hands, that the agency feels like it's taken away. And some of the questions that are kind of rolling around in my head are touching a little bit on on what Marco brought up, which is kind of the power structures. You know, when you have the people who are making policies and imagining the future are so out of touch this continent, then whose imagination is it? One of the things that I've learned to do as a storyteller, and learning from Dr. Kagura, Macharia, he provokes us to ask us, like, how we imagined freedom. And I think, if imagination is a muscle, then like, how can you imagine the future in small tangible things? Because there's also a way in which you thought gaslit you know, this narrative of, you know, you can do anything you want, if you just try hard enough. You know, you can sort of entrepreneur your way out of, you know, shitty policies. I'm not sure if I'm allowed to say that word, but I have. So So then so then really the question I'm asking myself is, is, what is the future and how can I how can you give shape to it? In little ways, what is what is a day feel like a day that has pleasure and joy and fulfilment and meaning, and how can you actually start to, to make that tangible?

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Elleke Boehmer 19:53

Thank thanks so there, um, that I mean, that is that really, really rings true or So with some of the research we've been doing in the accelerate hub, with African young people who, who may not feel that they have the resources to as, as you were saying to entrepreneur, their way out of out of, you know, a negative circumstance, but nonetheless, feel that drive and that energy that Michael was talking about, of, of, of kind of wanting to own the future, wanting to grab hold of it. Often by doing something, you know, connecting with other people. Sometimes, you know, joining, joining a group, and taking collective decisions. So, I think that bridges quite neatly, and I think I might, I might ask you to speak again, a layer that we, you know, we go back through, through through the order we just had. And, and I'd like to put this question to all three of you, which kind of builds on what you've been saying, I'd like us to think really concretely here, because we're talking about people who, who, who, who may not have access to that many resources, but who nonetheless want to be pragmatic, want to be in want to work

concretely. And, and, and, and might be helped by having a sense of, you know, how to move forward into the future. So, so the question is this, what helps us to feel empowered about the future in in your different work and your different writings? What have you noticed whether in your own experience or that of others you have worked with and observed, what helps us to feel empowered about the future? So imagine, you know, that people who will be young people who will be listening to this podcast in the future? What, what, what would you recommend? What would you advise, turn to concrete things if possible?



22:19

Layer here's what I found two things to be energising. One is connecting to things happening across the continent. And so I can say for sure that, you know, the roads must fall movement, the feminist activities happening around the continent, these are incredible spaces to connect to, to, to learn from to energise to imagine together to imagine outside of perhaps a space that you may be confined within, and to be in community with. So that's the first thing I found to be really incredibly useful. And the second thing that I'm finding here in Kenya especially is, you know, a return like I mentioned, the sort of historical storytelling we have. In Kenya very specifically, we have a sort of state prescribed amnesia that's robbed us of our of our history. And so what's happened is that we don't, we haven't we haven't seen ourselves as heroes. We haven't understood the struggles that we've been through we, we don't understand the complexities. We don't understand how we got through them, how we wrestled with power dynamics, what our ideologies were, what it is that we fought for, what is it, what it was that we dreamt, for, what our strategies were, you know, and so I'm seeing that youth are also, you know, really hungering and thirsting for these stories that have been kept away from them. And also finding energy in them, seeing the ways in which in you know, even in similar difficult situations, their ancestors would have navigated difficult times, would have imagined different ways of being and how what triumph looks like, what betrayal looks like, the complexities that that Johnny was talking about, that it isn't just a simple, singular story of freedom garnered, but that there was a wrestling of ideology, and in that kind of also getting their agency back seeing them as centre to the story. That's the thing that I'm finding is is really, really, youth in Kenya very specifically, are finding value in



Elleke Boehmer 25:00

Interesting, so interesting that idea of, of, of not simply getting freedom but wrestling with ideology, negotiating, and clearly also taking risk, which, which was something that that that John, you mentioned also in, in respect of Assad, the man of Good Hope. Michael, turning to you now, with this with this question of what helps us to feel empowered, what is in the journey that you were, that you were describing earlier, your own personal journey, what has particularly helped with, with with a sense of empowerment, or you're feeling empowered?



25:53

Okay, so the three main things that I've identified from my personal journey, but also just, you know, speaking to other people, the first, and I think the most significant for me is stability. So, you know, in order to be able to be able to even dream about the future and plan for the future, a stable present is important. And stability comes in many different forms. You know, there's

political instability, there's, there's political stability, there's economic stability, there's social stability, you need to have a community society country, that number one, you don't you feel like you can actually build a future in, you know, when you can, you know, buy property or start your own enterprise. And it doesn't all come crumbling down tomorrow, because of a particular, you know, government policy or something, that's something that's, I've personally seen in Zimbabwe, where, you know, the government can issue a policy and say, Oh, effective midnight, you know, this is this is now the situation, so you don't even have time to reorganise or, you know, rearrange what you started, because, literally, in a couple of hours, it's all done. So stability, for me is the first, the second really is resources, and resources, in terms of, you know, financial resources, but also, you know, social networks and safety nets is also very important. So, again, you know, speaking from personal experiences in Zimbabwe, where we, we are a generation that witnessed our parents pensions, everything that they worked for, wiped out overnight, like they had nothing left. And in turn, that meant, we had nothing that we had to not only find enough resources for ourselves, but to also support, you know, our parents and our grandparents as they got older. And if you can't get a stable job, if you can't even think of buying a house, if you can't be get a car, if you can't do any of these things, you're constantly living in the present, because you're constantly thinking about day to day, you don't have the capacity to build. The third thing is representation. And that mainly is political and economic representation. So if you don't have people in important positions who are representing your best interests, then people are not going to have your interests in mind when they're making particular policies, or when they're establishing particularly particular laws or trying to implement things. Because if you're not in the room, people aren't going to think of you it's that simple. As much as I think some of it is, you know, malevolent and intentional in terms of wanting to marginalise certain groups. Some of it is also just not knowing, because people who represent those clips are just not in the room. So those are the three things that for me are essential to, you know, the African youth and for me in particular, even like dreaming and building a future.

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Elleke Boehmer 29:09

So in a thanks, smoker, and so in your case, some of the risk that that Johnny was describing, as said, kind of grabbing hold of is actually anathema. You You know, what you're talking about is actually the need the hunger, the crying hunger for, for a sense of a future path at all, not simply living in the present, but but, but but having a sense of the present moves on into the future. And that bridge overwhelmed to Johnny subject who you introduced us to Johnny I've said so. So what would your response be then Johnny to this question of, of how do we feel empowered? And what are the barriers to feeling empowered? What perhaps, sort of, you know, focusing in on the case of a sad one, what what, what was it that you've really gone into this a bit but, you know, in relation to this question, what was it that allowed him to that empowered him to, to take that decision and, and and move to a completely different future than his parents had? Had? had had available?



30:45

In the short and blunt answer is that he had some understanding the real conditions of his life, and, and in fact, an extended point by talking about a completely different example, if you don't mind and and it really is a point about stressing that people are informed or honestly told of the real condition to their life. So about a decade ago, a really interesting book was



published called Growing up in the New South Africa by Rachel Bray and, and several other people have many, many things. One of the things they did is that they, they surveyed groups of high school students, one in fairly prosperous middle class area of Cape Town fishhook. And another just a few kilometres way, one of the most deprived areas in the Cape Peninsula massive formula and came up with this weird finding and fishhook levels of hope among middle class, high school students was quite low, in massive cumulate was pretty high. You know, in a standard quantitative gauge of zero to 10, the massive Calella youths were much more hopeful. And when the researchers dug a bit more, they said to the medical, malaria youth, what are you going to become when you grow up? And they would say, neurosurgeons, engineers, you know, highly trained university educated people. And they were wondering what to do with those findings. Because these kids were going to very poor schools, hardly any of them were going to get a university entrance. Clearly, they were not going to become engineers, or neuroscientists. And the researchers asked why they thought that they would be when objectively it just wasn't true. And essentially, they, they blamed the stories that young people were being told, firstly, by their church, you know, evangelical priests essentially saying, If you love God, he will love you back. And good things will come to you. The second day school principals saying, you know, you've seen the generation before you fail, but they failed, because they're bad people. And if you are good, you will be okay. And essentially, they were being told stories that were profoundly untrue. There were ostensibly stories of hope, ostensibly sort of stories about the future. But there, there were opiates. They weren't good stories at all. And I think that if those youths had been told that they probably would not become neurosurgeons they would probably not become engineers. And that was no fault of theirs. It was because of the world in which they were born, which was a deeply unfair, deeply unequal world. I think that would have been much, much more empowering. And understanding that that's not an easy thing to say, you know, what do people do when they're told that? Do they get angry and rebel? Maybe, maybe they should. I just think that, ironically, paradoxically, you have much more agency, if you're told that this feature is, in fact blocked you because there's something deeply wrong out there. I think that knowing those truths, being able to position oneself objectively and when society is empowering, and what decision you're going to make after that is, it could be a difficult decision that could be a district decision that could be a decision based on pure anger. It's really what happens next is unknowable. But I think the truth of one's circumstances is very important to know

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Elleke Boehmer 34:21

that there's an interesting link there but between what you were saying Johnny and what Marco was saying about about protest and the energy that she as a as a young student, got from some of the protest movements in the mid 2020. Teens. Miko would you would be would there be accurate?



34:48

Yes, actually. And it's interesting, Johnny when you're talking about, you know, being told untrue stories. That's something that came up specifically In the fees must fall protest in 2015. Because this is a generation of students who grew up being told in schools, but also just, you know, the media, the idea that, you know, apartheid was over the world was their oyster, they just had to go in, get an education, and they could improve, you know, their, their material conditions that they could be something in the world. But then when you get to university, the



reality is completely different. So, first of all, getting to university in itself was a privilege. And being able to stay in university, especially as school fees just went up and up every year, was also a privilege and just, you know, navigating this particular system, as someone who comes from a marginalised background, you know, racially, economically, socially, was some, some, some kind of a wake up call, I would say, and it really translated into a sense of anger, because, you know, the the reaction really was, this is something that should have happened, we should be able to do all these things, we should not have to have these particular roadblocks in our way, but they still exist. And yeah, it did translate into protest movements. But I think, you know, just zooming out a bit, and talking about like African youth as a whole. I think that that that theme of like an untrue story is also relevant, because especially when you look at, you know, news stories and speeches from politicians, you know, you're constantly told, Oh, the youth of the future, Oh, we love the youth, oh, we're implementing all these policies to ensure you know, youth participation and youth empowerment. But the reality on the ground, and the lived experiences are completely different. So, you know, sometimes that does translate into protests. Sometimes it translates to, as I've seen here, and then just a sense of like, apathy and resignation. But yeah, I think that that's a very interesting point, Johnny. And I mean, it's just that how relevant it is to so many different like contexts and countries.

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Elleke Boehmer 37:15

And a lab, would you have examples? In your own experience? Would you have examples in your own experience? relating to that sense of frustration, anger, and sort of betrayal by an older generation?



37:37

Yes, I mean, absolutely. I think in, in when we got rid of our dictator, I think that that the year after that was Kenya was the most optimistic country in the world. And I think the real tragedy is that so many of us believed that. Finally, things would be better, without realising that these were systemic issues that could not be solved at an individual level. And I think that's where the real frustration is, is there seems to be very little will to change the systemic imbalances, because obviously, they benefit, you know, a small group of powerful people at the top. And, you know, this idea that if you aren't being if you aren't able to get ahead in life, you know, it's your fault. Because all the opportunities are out there. And if you just, you know, if you just grit your teeth and work a little harder, you know, but, you know, how do you dream of tomorrow when today's beating at your door? And, you know, it's a lot of it is just pure lies. There's, there's a lot of lies that government tells about the opportunities that are being made available. So certainly, there's a betrayal and in a way, this is why I'm less interested in my own imagination of the future than I am of the younger generations, because my imagination is already tainted by bitterness and cynicism. And I already it's kind of it's caged in a little bit. You know, I'm already beaten down by, you know, seeing several different hopes being dashed. And there's a thing that youth can can imagine that once you get past a certain generation, I think you just, you just can't but that's just my personal opinion.

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Elleke Boehmer 39:51

So we've got to a place of a very, very interesting place of recognise I think that there are systemic issues which which dampen and stifle young people's hope, and the sense of the

future being open to them to pick up on that, that great line, you gave us a layer, you know, how do you greet tomorrow when today is is beating at your door and beating at your door often in a threatening way. And I just throw something out that's has been kind of perhaps simmering under the surface of everything we've been saying. It may sound really, you know, quite sort of weak and ineffectual as a as as as a suggestion of moving forward. But we have been talking about, about leaders we have been talking about, you know, what fosters a sense of optimism. We have been talking about unhelpful stories as well as helpful stories. Do role models help? Do what are the exemplary stories, if in that context of in, in in the cape that you were alluding to, Johnny, if in that context, those kind of impossible, big dreams were actually disempowering, then they weren't empowering? What are those? What are the role models, the stories, the inspiring tales that might work in these very, very difficult circumstances that that we've all been been touching on when, you know, when, when today is beating at your door? Just I mean, we can just, you know, toss out a few things. We're not going to solve it here. But But, but But thinking of who might be listening to to this podcast in the future? What are the what are the are their role models stories that might help?



42:19

Is that for me? Um, you know, I think that role models in one way or another are stitched into every human beings imagination that we we we, you know, we idealise? We always imagining particular people when we imagine the future. I mean, I think that when you're growing up in very difficult circumstances, the range of role models are always vast. They are, you know, from people with style people with many people who can exercise violence, people who've managed to get out and get ahead. And the question of which of those role models the young person is going to identify with is, is wide open. But they can lead in in 100 different directions. But yes, I think it's inevitable that they are always role models, we, we struggle to imagine the future without watching somebody else doing it first. I guess I want to distinguish between two different sorts of role models and, and the one is somebody who is idealised into a guard and therefore becomes unattainable and becomes a disempowering dream, who actually strips you of your own agency because you couldn't possibly get you can't be a god. And the other is the sort of role model who is actually attainable, who is still human being. It's such an important distinction, and it matters so much, which is which.



Elleke Boehmer 43:54

I'm very struck by just to quote you know, one example that I find very interesting in the, in the British context is, is the example of the footballer Marcus Rashford, who who has who you buy your building charities and and embracing, you know, some of the, you know, the kind of failure as well as as well as success has is I think, extremely interesting role model and one, you know, he is a role model for for a lot of young people in Britain. But I'm talking too much Miko or LM on this question of role models.



44:49

I think it's very interesting what you said Johnny about, you know, the two different kinds of role models because it's true, but I tend to like put specific labels on them. So the first time we, you know, where you talk about role models who are idolised into becoming gods in a negative

way, for me, from what I've seen, always tend to be political leaders. So whether it's a president or you know, an opposition leader, because instead of you know, that person being aspirational, encouraging you to do better. They, they, they, they embody a sort of saviour role, like, you know, they're the ones who are going to save us, they're the ones who are going to fix all of our problems and my current situation. And whilst obviously it is the duty and obligation of politicians and people in positions of power to serve, more often than not, that's not what happens. So that idealisation often turns into disappointment. And you know, again, that that sense of apathy and just like completely giving up on the system, and just like disengaging the second kind of role model, which I've seen specifically in Zimbabwe, but also other countries, in terms of you know, this is someone who's still human, who you can look up to, and who you still have that kind of level of access to, I would say, for me has really been musicians, firstly, and secondly, athletes. So, you know, in the Zim context, where you have musicians, such as Winky Dee, who, you know, make music that really speak to a lot of the conditions that people are living in, but also have like an element of hope, and, you know, celebration of, you know, Zimbabwe as a country. And not only that, but you know, sticking to your roots, like sticking to your roots in terms of, they're not living apart from their communities, they they still go into the the places that they grew up in, they engage with young people there, they have conversations, you know, they give back. And those are the kind of role models that I look at more positively because a pass because they aren't associated with political power, they have more freedom to move, they have that ability to get closer to people and to represent people's interests. So yeah, musicians, athletes, I've seen like consistently tend to be the favourite role models of youth especially marginalised youth and delayer.

E

Elleke Boehmer 47:29

With your interest in in culture and music and dance. Would you relate to, to that idea of of role model that some bed Miko mentioned?



47:42

Yeah, absolutely. Especially musicians. I think, I think what what, what there is, a yearning for though, is more complexity in the way these role models are. portrayed, you know, the sense of, we want to know the how not just the what, and certainly, you know, like Michael mentioned, and marginalised communities, musicians that are very connected to those communities, and really have a really, really doing the work to try and, and bring people along with them. There's definitely also like a values question at hand in Kenya's, you know, around who deserves to be a role model? What values should a role model have? And this is something that youth are challenging. And I think, absolutely, rightfully so, because religious bodies have really let the youth down and still insist on bearing kind of the moral compass of who should be who should be held up and who shouldn't. And so there's, there's an interesting conversation around that that's happening, you know, within our media and within, you know, the communities themselves as well.

E

Elleke Boehmer 49:07

So we're moving towards the end of our time together I I'd love to talk all morning because there's such fascinating questions and and ideas that are coming out of out of this discussion, about risk and about danger and about systems and about and about frustration with those

systems. But as we are moving to the end of our time, perhaps we can we can come to a close with just a kind of a round of, of if it doesn't sound over optimistic. I've kind of recommendations for on the basis of this discussion and on the basis of your work and and your experience with storytelling and seeing you People take up role models from the sporting world or from, from, from music. I'm really interested in this question, you just raised a lab about wanting to know the how rather than just the what the how of the role models and how we mobilise these, these more these positive, but also doable, you know, stories in our lives, and how young people to the extent that we, you know, we are, we are in touch, and my motto was certainly speaking as a young person, how we mobilise these stories in our lives. So, if we can just me we're not going to, you know, this isn't going to be conclusive. But if we could just, just think about the, you know, wanting to know, the, the how, rather than just the what, and what our recommendations might be in, in thinking about the future? Or, you know, how do we, how do we greet the future, when today is still knocking at our door? Big Question, who'd like to who'd like to take a punch at it? First?

 51:18

I can go ahead. You know, I think about I think it was Maryam Kaba who said hope is a discipline. And I think I hold onto that, my hold on to what it looks like to exercise hope, every day, you know, in every way in your life. And I think about how, you know, the powerful structures work very hard to, to extinguish that hope. Because once they have, then it's just easier for them to kind of carry on doing what they do. And so this idea of hope, feels important and urgent to me, and also feels necessary to share in community, whatever way that might be, and to really cherish whatever it is that does offer hope and not invalidate it. And kind of parallel to that, I think, is also this idea of imagination being a muscle. And also, you know, particularly in the Kenyan context, where our education systems work so hard to really, really stamp out any form of imagination, you know, the, your imagination becomes like this, the most powerful tool that you have, you know, without it this, there's no possibility for anything different. And so how to then exercise that imagination, and how to exercise and in ways that have meaning for you, even if other people say it is useless, because there will be a lot of that also, the thing that you're doing doesn't have validity, it's not useful. It's, and I think there's to resist that is also very powerful and to be in community because it's, you know, it's difficult, it's lonely, it's hard, you know, it's and there's such such joy, love and power and community.

 Elleke Boehmer 53:17

Thanks so much. Gosh, that was very inspiring. Johnny, if I can turn to you next and and then Marco.

 53:28

So I don't have recommendations. i It would be presumptuous. So can I rather end on just on a note that that I wrestle with about imagination, a question that I just don't know the answer to, and that I think is difficult. And it comes from your your reference to Marcus Rashford? I mean, what are people doing when they get excited about Marcus Rashford? There? I mean, 990 9000s out of 100 1000s are not going to become professional footballers. And what they're doing is becoming a professional footballer in their imagination living vicariously through

Marcus Rashford. And my question is, is that a good thing? Or is that a bad thing? And and I don't think there's a simple answer to this. I think that we all need to live in fantasy just to be human beings, just to imagine the future to have hope all of that requires living vicarious lives that are not ours, that other people's and it's healthy. But there's a point at which becomes destructive. There's a point in which it's too much about fantasy and not about our own lives. And exactly where that line is, I don't know. But it seems a really, really important line to me, about imagination, about fantasy about storytelling, about its enormous power, but also its potential destructiveness. I think the line between the power and the distractions is quite blurred. And I want to know more about exactly where it is and why



55:00

Thanks and Miko.



55:03

Um, so the first thing that I'll say, speaks to layers last comment on community. I think it involves like, a micro and a macro approach. So you know, on a community level, I do think community building, and just having those spaces where people can talk about what they're going through, is really important. Because in situations of, you know, political, social, economic crises and instability, even though you know, everyone else is struggling, it's also very easy to feel like you're the only one who's going through something. And with that comes a sense of shame and isolation. But knowing that you have, you know, the social support, you have people that you can talk to you have those spaces available, I think it's the first step in addressing, you know, the issues of the present in order to build a tomorrow. I think the second thing really, for me, and this is, again, gonna honour, like zooming out, is about implementation. And one of the most frustrating things to me is a lot of policies, really great policies, and really great frameworks exist, like the day. So, you know, the AU has the African youth charter, Zimbabwe has the National Youth Policy, we have a whole youth council. The problem is implementation that those great policies and those great frameworks and that like big vision isn't being translated to on the ground actions. So in order to like, like, a recommendation really would be to get to get implementing. Unfortunately, a lot of that is in the hands of government, which usually is not the quickest or the best in terms of implementation, which is why I think there needs to be a lot more participation from civil society and the private sector as well. So those are the two things that I can really think of in terms of recommendations. And just apartment a bit on Johnny's question. I don't know. I mean, I interpret that differently. So if we're going to use the example of Marcus Rushford, but you can, you know, substitute in for any other kind of role model, um, in different communities, it's not necessarily about, you know, wanting to become a footballer or wanting to become a musician, for every single person, it's more a situation of this is someone who has managed to, you know, rise up or rise out of their particular conditions, but hasn't forgotten where they came from this still who they are at the end of the day, and they haven't let that change affect their personality, and they still feel connected to their society and their community. That's how I interpreted so even if, you know, they don't end up becoming professional footballers or musicians or just athletes in general, that sense of, you know, not forgetting who you are not forgetting the community that raised you is something that will still stick with people, even when you know, they're 2030 or 40.

E

Elleke Boehmer 58:29

That's incredibly helpful and very, very rich and interesting. Just pulling the sum of those final thoughts together. And hope is a discipline. Imagination is a muscle, I love that. We all need to live in fantasy, but how and that wonderful urge urging that you offered at the end there Mako of you know, let's get implementing and not forget where we come from, not forget our past as we move through this strange present into into our future. And the there is a great thoughts if not recommendations, very thoughts to take away from from this discussion on the future really sort of positive ways on which to to end, even as we recognise that there are so many difficulties that press down on on on people's lives. I'd like to thank all three of you very, very warmly for joining this discussion today. I really enjoyed it. I'd love to do another round at some point. Thank you very much to Johnny Steinberg, to makeovers Ender and to Allerca some all power to your amazing work in your different contexts. You you are building the future through your stories and and through your example. And thank you and thank you to everyone who's been listening. It's been it's been really great having this conversation today. Goodbye