

Dash: Hi, my name is Dashiell Moore, I'm a lead researcher on a research project funded by the Australian Research Council investigating connections in Australian and Pacific literature. As part of that research project, I'm conducting a series of interviews with individuals, writers, historians, and community members, who have much to say about the intersections between Australian and Pacific histories and particularly thinking about carceral histories [through spaces] such as the Plantation, the Reserve and the Detention Centre.

Dash: Today we're located in Gadigal country in Pyrmont and I'm here joined by Wasakam elder Emelda Davis, city of Sydney councillor

Emelda: Former!

Dash: - former city of Sydney councillor, and long-time campaigner on Australian South Sea Islander rights over decades, and we're here to talk about the wider history of blackbirding and plantation labour in Australia. Emelda, would you be able to introduce yourself in your own words?

Emelda: Sure. So, my custom name is Wasakam from Vanuatu. That was bestowed on me in recognition of leadership, but also reconnecting with Country and family in Vanuatu, and the work that we've done here in Australia. My birth name is Emelda Davis. Emelda Mary Davis. And I am a proud Australian South Sea Islander, second generation descendant of Tanna, Ambae, and Santo. So with that, it's quite complex in that people are like oh well you're talking about First Nations. Well the Santo family are one of the largest Aboriginal and South Sea Islander families in far North Queensland all the way to Cape York, Aore Island, and also they're all throughout the Torres Strait. So Saint Paul and places like that. In researching, through my own history and thesis, "Children of the Sugar Slaves", speaking to different Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal communities, and identifying that name, the connection, the kinship, we found that it's huge. So what is it that we're going to do in leading into the future in documenting and I guess trying to find this family. Yeah? There have been books written about the Santo Family by an Aboriginal South Sea Islander man who is a Santo descendant but also, my father is from the Caribbean.

So he came here in the late 50s as a musician. And you know as people of colour, Black people we find comfort in our own communities or people that identify with us. So he came to the Gold Coast, Tweed heads. And met my mother up there as a touring musician and he spent the rest of his life here. He didn't grow up, I didn't grow up with him. But either way, it was, you know, the era of a White Australia policy, you know, late 50s, still remnants of, while finding community and family in Australia and travelling. He ended up passing here and went back to the Tweed where he settled and he's buried up there. So, I identify as a proud Australian, South Sea, Islander with diverse indigenous ancestry, which is also African descent. I'm a person of African descent. I did my DNA, which identified nine countries of Africa. Uh, and mainly West Africa. So, it really speaks truth to the slavery route and the effects of slavery on a global scale. The fact that I am so diverse and that it's connecting two extreme parts of the world through the Atlantic

slave trade. Yeah? So it didn't discriminate. It just went to all of these different communities.

Dash: I'm interested in, there are so many of these strands that pick up on, but that's precisely like your family history. It's so interwoven across histories of enslavement and colonialism. But your father was from the Caribbean, from Trinidad?

Emelda: Grenada.

Dash: Grenada. Okay. There's a book called *Adding Piemento* which [tells the stories of] Caribbean immigrants into Australia. It's written out of Melbourne.

Emelda: Well, the first man to plant sugarcane in Australia was a Caribbean man.

Dash: Staying with the Tweed and with your family there in terms of the history of blackbirding and how it shaped the outlook of Australia, maybe you could tell me specifically about your grandfather, Moses coming out of Middlebush in Vanuatu, right? So, would you be able to kind of relay that story up to the Tweed?

Emelda: So through this oral history, yeah? Grandfather Moses was stolen off the beach with two of his friends. They were swimming and they were coerced onto a ship. He was from Middlebush, 'middle of the bush.' So he obviously walked down to the water. And, you know, there's many stories on Tanna that tell this story where they've walked down to gather fish or the men hunters and gatherers, and, water and food, and they never returned. That's a common theme. Grandfather Moses was snatched, he was taken to Bundaberg -

Dash: his age, he was twelve right?

Emelda: Yeah. So he was 12 years old, thereabouts. How he identifies his age I don't know. Given where he is from and where he was taken to and how do they define that. At twelve years old, he was put to work on Ferrymead plantation. The whole CSR Sugar nightmare, as many were right? So Bundaberg was that first port for many and Bundaberg also now has a sister city agreement with Vanuatu, Santo in particular, because of that connection and it's a direct route from the islands. So we did that in 2021 to recognise, and the mayor apologised to the Australian South Sea Islander community or descendants of blackbirding for what occurred. Because it played a key role [but] there's no reparations today or reciprocity that's occurred for our mob. With grandfather, he ended up because I think he came on the brink and then what we identified is that, it could have been maybe the late 1800s, so that's when I guess Federation was coming in and the laws were so harsh in Queensland and he escaped and actually, in *Sugar Slaves*, my mother's sister talks about him walking to Sydney.

Dash: That's right -

Emelda: And getting exploited as a dishwasher hand. And we identified the street here some time ago which is John Street in Ashfield, which was some sort of not a convent. What do you

call it?

Dash: Like temporary accommodation? A refuge?

Emelda: Yeah. And so, he obviously got ripped off here and went back to the Tweed and settled and started implementing his own business and things like that because on the borders, uh we found that, obviously, and still today, New South Wales is so Progressive in terms of social justice, despite the challenges with racism and conscious bias and all the stuff that goes on for communities, because we are a Multicultural Society. Settling on the Tweed, he had a great - in terms of what he's coming from - a great time in establishing his family, and had 11 children. Yoongala was the first farm they lived on, which is about ten kilometres out of Murwillumbah. I grew up with my Nana, so he died when I was born. So it was literally the year he died. It was the year I was born, so I don't even know if he got to hold me. Or anything like that. But either way, he gave each of his family a traditional name or a custom name for the children, which I see like a blueprint. That's significant. Defining the odds, right? And just, because Nanna and my own grandfather was, through my own oral history research, he was a very hard assertive man. Yeah, and he didn't take any crap. And he didn't speak much English, but the people knew who he was and respected him, and my Nana, in that community. So, that was really nice and I can see the leadership that came out of Tweed Heads and that era or generation, the first Generations where that comes from, that lived experience of, you know, resisting and recreating Community.

Dash: If I could, I mean there's so many threads to pick up on, but I want to talk about that journey to Sydney, the walk to Brisbane, the walk to Sydney, coming out of Bunderberg, coming out of Ferrymead, which mirrors similar stories of that era, but maybe, could you pick up on the first port, so to speak, the plantation -

Emelda: Ferrymead?

Dash: Yes, have you spoken to any of the descendants of the people who owned it or kind of who worked it, any administrators?

Emelda: No you tend to, I mean there are - in Bundaberg, there's an association. Over the years, we've tried to contact CSR Sugar, Bundaberg Rum over the years. I've still got the email, they just don't engage. They can't assist at this point in time. You know, the usual, um, response - there is a liability here and I guess people don't know how they're going to deal with that, right? So unless we have Government goodwill to assist us in advocating and negotiating, we're in a bit of a rock and a hard place.

So, until such time that there's respect for what's occurred - I don't doubt that there's not respect, but I think there needs to be a proactive nature behind all of this. Yeah? So who's going to take that on? I mean, we're proactive, we're calling it out, we're doing the best we can with the resources we have. But, you know, there are people in higher positions than we are that can actually change this overnight.

Dash: I'll ask in a second about the impact of Faith Bandler and the impact of her novels, *Wacvie* and *Welo*, but very quickly on the subject of petitions to government that you're talking about: I remember looking through archival collections held at the New South Wales State Library which holds Faith's correspondence. There are records of her writing to Gordon Bryant, the minister for Indigenous Affairs that was newly set up. Faith asked him, in 1975, to instigate the process of inquiring into reparations from CSR sugar and Burns Philp and Company. Yep you know and it's this remarkable thing - this was now 50 years ago. And Gordon Bryant to his credit. Maybe he was riding on the goodwill of the referendum, said you know, we are in full flight on this issue, but you know what happened?

Emelda: It's this constant rhetoric smoothing it over, so we need political goodwill. We also need our First Nations Community to stand with us. You know, um, to come out and call it out and be a part of the reconciliation process that we need. This is not rocket science, right? It's not something that I see as, oh well, we're intruding or we're overstepping, or but you only identify, what's in it for First Nations? There's a lot in it because until we tell the truth, we're not going to progress as a nation. Yeah. And we're in a truth-telling phase, that's when the Makaratta came out, and I asked the question: what's in it for South Sea Islanders? How are we going to be engaged when we have communities, children, families, livelihoods entwined in our First Nations? Yeah. So why are we not being heard? Why are we not getting an opportunity? Yes we've got even Megan Davis. Yeah? So, where is the advocacy there in putting this forward?

We understand First Nations first, but it's not without our Australian South Sea Islander families. Because this advocacy was a joint effort. It was all about Black Power. It wasn't about: are you Aboriginal? Are you Torres Strait? Are you South Sea? Are you African? It was Black Power and cross-sectional. And it didn't discriminate. It was people of colour. It was Black people, Black and Brown people. So, the sooner we go back to that, the sooner we'll have progress but what we've got now is fractions see how the government's providing this and providing that and really breaking up the train of thought around Unity. Yeah? And a collective approach to social justice for marginalised communities and addressing the atrocities that have occurred for many people, but, you know, I'm one person!

Australian South Sea Islander organisation for Port Jackson is one organisation and a unique organisation. We're doing the social justice, we're calling stuff out. There's QUASSIC (Queensland United Australian South Sea Islander Council), which is doing great work and cultural maintenance, the history, and all that great work that Imelda Miller is doing. But Queensland has a different policy to New South Wales, so that's why I'm pushing New South Wales to be put on the map through a lot of this research that people are doing. We need to have something grand to put it out there, because Sydney managed this trade! Sydney received the benefits!

Dash: Yes, let's pick up that point. I'd like to make a point on these different legislations by state. One of the things that I've been able to pick up from people writing about this history is that, while there is a remarkable continuity across Pacific and Australian accounts, this is belied by

the fact that you have different legislations, different jurisdictions, in which the trade could be policed. So you have ships swapping flags to go into French territories, or to get an exemption by -

Emelda: Deception!

Dash: Yes, deception, by so many means, but by kind of working through these limited political and legal spaces that you can kind of gain exemptions and loopholes, we see the continuity of this history. Is that a good place to start with thinking about Sydney and Sydney's place?

Emelda: We have to think of Sydney because yeah, it's the first port, right?

Dash: Yeah.

Emelda: People can't ignore that fact. When I say it to Queensland, they said like, 1847 Benjamin Boyd, but there were only 200 people. 201 persons, it's still coercion, trickery, slavery, and it fed industries in this state.

Dash: The first 'failed experiment', a precedent!

Emelda: Yeah, and may I just mention the advocacy of ASSIPJ in changing the name of one of the largest landmass in the country, Benjamin Boyd Park. We played an integral role in bringing that truth of Ben Boyd to the government, um, and Minister Keane. When I met him, he said he never knew about it but he was happy to support it and he hopes that this goes some way forward towards, you know, social justice access and equity for our people. This is what we're faced against trying to convince, you know, the leaders, those in power to uh, I guess pick up the baton and keep advocating for this change. Ben Boyd Park was a significant acknowledgement of this trade should be sufficient, but it was all done, very harsh-hush, the change of name.

And when I went there for the opening, I went there a couple of times, the people there said, 'oh but you know, it happened, oh but,' but they made their money from the success of the work done by our people. Look at that Lighthouse, the lighthouse of the Maritime Museum. That can't go to waste, there's blood, sweat and tears, and, you know, we just want acknowledgement and we want our next generations to have the right that First Nations do in terms of, you know, program services and access and Equity because there's nothing here. We're just thrown under the Multicultural Banner. Like, it's something nothing. Yeah, we didn't ask to be here. We were stolen. And I don't care what people say in terms of slavery definition, indentured labour, etc. It's an abuse of Human Rights. We're seeing it today with the seasonal workers scheme.

Dash: I was going to ask you about PALMS [the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme].

Emelda: the bloody visa, 403, ties you to your employer. That's slavery. What country does that?

Dash: There's an evolving discourse around that. You can still see someone trapped to a certain employer. I remember a recent conference paper addressing the fact that the control of that system is facilitated by the removal of the relationship between, you know, the farmer, and the labourer. It's all orchestrated at a higher level, so it means that you have no one to appeal to in order to make a claim or find someone responsible. So, identifying someone responsible for a particular loophole or this abuse, it's harder -

Emelda: Well again, that's government trickery. They outsource a third party to take on that responsibility of looking after the human rights and social justice aspect of the trade, of the PALM scheme. Yeah. So does that make sense? Yeah. So the liability doesn't sit with the government, it sits with the third party. Yeah? So there's agents, yeah second party, sending them here, to farmers, and there's this ... constant. Ever since the inception of the trade.

Dash: It's a similar distribution of responsibility. Maybe coming back to Tweed because I think it's important to capture that as a particular space, particularly in the history of New South Wales. Where Moses comes to work. Um, I think you mentioned it before but there's also there's Is it Kajun?

Emelda: Kujin

Dash: Kujin. The Rob family who managed it first. Could you speak about that space and the relationships that took place there and how that leadership emerged?

Emelda: Look, um, and, and one of the things that I really loved about Tweed when I went back there to speak to the communities and the families and black and white people about, you know, how was it here? So I'm from Chindera, which was considered, you know, as a ... town camp back then. So that's where all the poorest dirt people lived, right? Yeah. And obviously the majority were Australian South Sea Islanders, but there were white people. And when I interviewed former councillors, they were just the most wonderful people. And the wife was the Secretary of the first organisation formed in 1972 for Australian South Sea Islanders. [...] Tweed really did leave in terms of political savvy. So a lot of those people moved away and resettled across the border in the 1860s or thereabouts? They created this political movement and then they were travelling down here to Sydney and going back. Like my mum for one. Yeah. So she got her nursing degree at the age of sixteen. But at the same time, she was very much a part of the activism and the movement. Because it was a lifestyle, it was a birthright, it wasn't something she could avoid.

So we had to continually advocate in our own ways for access, equity, social justice. So what happened with the Tweed when I was interviewing, they said, yeah, we were all poor as dirt. The common goal was, you know, food, picking berries off the trees, eating and shooting little wallabies.

Dash: On Chindera, Nancy Cato, an Australian journalist wrote a novel about Chindera called *Brown Sugar*, it's very Faulknerian, as different generations came to the plantation structure, but yeah, that may be more of a note for me than you!

Emelda: Speaking to Wilma Toer, Faith's cousin, because they're Mussings, and she's also our first cousin on the Toer side. Sarah Booki Toer, who is my great, great grandmother, who was taken from Ambae. But they have both deep, little gems of what occurred up there. I lived there when I was 11, 12 years old and I came to Sydney, then I went to Canberra to live with aunty Nauru, but at the same time I grew up just children were seen not heard, and we would just sit and listen and observe what was going on in terms of a political movement, especially, um, Phyllis Corowra, my mother's sister, was incredible with that leadership as well as uncle Allen and Aunty Margeret Togo. They're all deceased now but those stories are incredibly powerful in how they asserted themselves into a society. Does that make sense like yeah? It was like, they weren't going away and I think that's where I get it from. People are like, how do you stand being around all these whitefellas? And I'm like, well shit, I have a right to be here. So people look at me and like, oh yeah, but she's over there. She's doing this and she's bringing all these mob, the events we're doing, you know, it's, it's not the mob, you'll see, it's a diverse range of people that are engaging with the narrative, you know?

But that's where the power comes from. We can talk to each other all day as blackfellas. But at the same time, we've got to step outside of our box. We've got to bring that change through engaging more with broader communities. Yeah, because we tend to lock ourselves into this - I get the self-determination and the importance of you know, having community, and being immersed in your mob. But also I see the great benefits in telling a story and really being out there and face to face like we are and sharing that narrative rather than - feeling like a victim? I'm not a victim. I'm someone who has a need for equality. As a human being. As a woman. But first and foremost as a black woman. Yeah, I'm not a feminist. But I'm a black woman seeking social justice.

Dash: I want to pick up on the journey that you made as an 11 year old from Chindera to Sydney. I was thinking about -

Emelda: frightening!

Dash: And Moses came to Sydney too, right?

Emelda: Yes, but I didn't know that at the time.

Dash: Of course, I'm thinking about these two journeys. To move out of a given space to elsewhere. It captures what you're saying. It's like moving outside of a given territory, the indentured contract for one, and a space of the plantation for another. What family stories can you recall or experiences of your own, allowed to break out of that model?

Emelda: I was terrified. I was put on the plane by myself. I was eleven or twelve. Aunty Corowra

put me on the TAA [Trans Australia Airlines. She whacked me on the plane and I came down here and it was, and it was different, because I didn't grow up with my mum. I was always with my Nana, Nana Enares. I was always going pea picking, potato picking, or going up North, being a part of that seasonal worker route, I was always by her side in the fields, or, you know, doing stuff. She'd find a school for me to attend while she'd go and do day work and we'd stay with cousins. So, coming to the big smoke I ended up having to go to Bondi primary. Very white, very racist. Not knowing how to react. Because I was a bit of a tomboy, I'd hit first and talk later. Being bullied a lot. And my brother was here with mum. Mum was a nurse down here. So, engaging with a whole different community group mum was very diverse. She was like me. She was very much, um, included in all communities. Very black power focused, though, because she did a lot of work at the Black Theatre, and she engaged us for our, I guess, our cultural fix through Redfern but we lived in Bondi. My mum was the first black woman to buy a property in Bondi, and it would have been about '67 or thereabouts - 80 O'Brien Street, that's where she lived. Well, where I grew up partially -

Dash: Not so far away from the Nimrod Theatre of Kings Cross.

Emelda: I was really seeing, mainly grown up white people, but my mother mixed with different Black communities through the black theatre. My dad was here as well then, so he was engaged - or his Caribbean Community was engaged - as a part of the Black Theatre as well. So we had this black Bohemian movement. But we don't have that anymore and it's very us and them. And it's sad, really? Because it's discriminatory behaviour, adopting the colonial framework. And I don't like it.

Dash: Defining indigenous by land or blood?

Emelda: And we get all that.

Emelda: And we talk about first lore, L-O-R-E. So what's going on here? Yeah, people are confused. Yeah, that's what I guess money does, yeah? When governments are throwing money at communities.

Dash: And we're seeing the unfortunate um consequence of that in the news on the mining companies across Western Australia right now. Could you tell me about the labour that you've had to take on in documenting this as part of South Sea Islanders for Port Jackson and as a community historian? How have you tracked this history? The physical records of this history.

Do you keep these archives yourself? What's been your experience?

Emelda: Yeah, look, there's so much stuff. In the cupboard, in the front rooms, in a box. Yeah, boxes upon boxes. There's a lot of it because I come from a film and television background. I document everywhere, right? Yeah, everything I'm doing, I document. So back when it was, uh, digital cam and things like that tape, um, we've got it all in the front room. So there's a whole bunch of stuff that needs to be unearthed, to tell the journey of Australian South Sea Islanders

Port Jackson, in particular. This is what I was talking to Jude [Jude Philp] about. Yes, we're talking about plantations and family stories, but we need a structured chronological order of achievement.

Dash: It's an important point - not being defined by -

Emelda: Yes!

Dash: and tracing connections between a place like the National Black Theatre and Black Power, and South Sea Islander organisations today?

Emelda: Faith was a part of that, and Carol Johnson from the States. But they're being written out of the narrative. So my thing is bringing it back into the narrative and telling our part of that story. And that's where I saw my mother, as being one of those soft activists. She was someone who mobilised the community, who could bring people together, uh, to participate and advocate. And it was broad, because it was also working with the unions and sustainability for Indigenous peoples in general: justice, housing.

Dash: And that would've been a hard conversation historically: if you consider the outlawing of South Sea Islanders from the unions, to then take up that dialogue and be so open to people across faiths, across cultures, you know, people like Faith, people like yourself, it's extraordinary.

Emelda: Both sides of the government agreed on the deportation, you know, and the unions as well because it was about white jobs for white people, right?

Dash: And that's a decision made not far from where we're standing -

Emelda: Well it's the White Australia Policy. It just ruled. The exporting of our people en masse. Because obviously the work had been done, the land had been cleared, the fields have been planted, people were walking in, saying, I've got this. Yeah, I don't need to sit back and stress. I can work in this heat and mechanical machinery came into the plantation. It made life easier for the powers that be.

Dash: Maybe we can touch upon the name point. The slavery question or blackbirding. I know we touched upon this. Clive Moore and Tracy Banivanua Mar have both added to this discourse from different points of view, emphasising around the language and agency of South Sea Islander labourers in the indenture contract. This is not to retread trodden ground for the sake of it. I see it important as these same conversations are happening in PAMLS for instance, it's become a problem of public history that repeats every few years, who is legible, where, what fits. How are textbooks written? So, if I could ask you: What's in a name?

Emelda: Blackbirding or slavery? Well, what isn't a name? I mean, what I think people need to do is to sit in these communities, researchers. [...CUT...] It's one thing to do desktop research

and have your interpretation, your lived experience, guide what you're putting on the paper. [...CUT...] regardless of immersing or mixing with the community - you don't have that deep-seated lived experience, you're not born into it. There's this custom and culture and language for Australian South Sea Islanders, we're born into it, that no one can interpret, unless you're born into it. Yeah? Your experience. What you wake up every morning feeling: what you wake up every morning. Wondering: where's your next feed coming from? I shouldn't be in the fields at 10 years old picking bloody peas and whatever with my nana! I didn't know any other lifestyle, so that's my work ethic. That's why I work like a dog today. It doesn't matter whether I'm paid or not. I'm just out there and I'm working consistently. So, you know, I think government and academic interpretations of what occurred: I think the people have the right to decide, not anybody else, because that lived experience of what my grandfather experienced - was always slavery. Imagine, how old are your kids?

Dash: Two - and minus three months.

Emelda: Yeah. Okay, oh well. But imagine them stolen off the beach? So what is going to be their lived experience and their interpretation at that point in time when they're taken off that beach away from their family and never to see them again? People signing contracts in good faith - as are today with the PALMs scheme - whether it be a thumb print, whether it be a scribble on a paper, but coming here. For example, I've got a call from South Australia saying so many women were brought here from Vanuatu just two weeks ago. And taken to South Australia. In freezing cold conditions sent to work with. No jumpers. Yeah, in their 'Mary dresses' to pick fruit and they had to do it because they're bound to that 403 Visa. They couldn't -

Dash: Madness.

Emelda: Yeah, and no jackets, given nothing. Just put out to work in the cold. So the person who manages that farm, or the agent, that got money, big money, to have those people here. Where's their duty of care? Yeah. So for me even that concept is slavery because that's one person controlling another by the terms of - so that's an individual thing for the community to decide what it was. It's not for anyone else to decide. I don't care about the contracts. Yeah, abuse is abuse. I don't care. And they were abused en masse and they were treated as slaves. They were diaries. You know, there were caricatures done of people in chains. Like look, people aren't just making this shit up. You know, like accept it for what it is and let's move on and start to repair this and give back, because no one's wealthy out of this trade. I don't sit here before you with millions in the bank. I'm lucky if I've got a grand in the bank, right?

But the thing is, we have our lives and we have our memory and that's our wealth. We have what families we have left of this. And to create a better future for those families is what we need, you know, more than anything. But [at] a government level, at the powers that can make a change, we hope that the Nakamal agreement that Penny Wong is proposing in relationship with Vanuatu, which was one of the largest or was the largest recruiter for this blackbird trade, in particular, we hope that there's going to be some sort of reciprocity and I guess redemption.

And that's not without fighting and consistently getting in front of both parties - ASSIPJ (Australian South Sea Islanders, Port Jackson), no one else is doing what we do politically. Yeah, it's groundbreaking. And I'm not saying it for any particular reason other than [that] we are bringing about change because they're not talking to anyone else about some of these atrocities that are going on. No one's really calling it out. Other people will sit and they'll be a part of all these forums, and they won't call out the slavery. They won't call out the 40 deaths a year that are sent home in a box for the PALMS scheme. They won't call out the false contracts. They haven't traveled to the regions and sat in these people's houses and witnessed 90 cents paychecks for their hard work [of] labor, fortnightly labor. They haven't got photos of where these women are sleeping [with] six women in a room with a ceiling fan that's just above her head. They're not making the physical [effort] unless they're getting paid to do it. They don't do it. A lot of these people that are working as people who care about what's going on for our people, you need to take the monetary gain out of a lot of things also, because otherwise you don't get the authenticity of it all. You get this glossed over version of "oh, well, that's okay. We'll just set up a hotline. And we've got materials that are written". Like who, the fuck's got time when you're picking fruit? 12 hours a day to actually pick up a phone and negotiate your conditions.

Dash: You need specialised training also to work through the language!

Emelda: Yeah, that's such a colonial framework that alienates and marginalizes us even more. And that's what ASSIPJ wants: self-determination. We want to run programs for us by us with Vanuatu and counteract some of those challenges where we empower our people to do that work here. Australia should be – as a pilot program - be bringing Vanuatu workers to roll out the administration and agency work that is required. Because that way you're going to get transparency for these people but [the] same with the blackbirding, "Oh okay we had 20 people get on the ship and they all put their thumbprint. They all agreed."

Dash: Blatant coercion and deception. To your point earlier, take this with a grain of salt, Emelda has just spoken about - that there's this common thread in oral stories about being picked off the beach, being picked out of the surf. It's repeated again in literature across the period of the games of deception. It's the contract, the agreement and the various deceptions that can go into it. The asking [of] people to put up the hand for the amount of months that they want to spend as opposed to years, [or] the amount of yams that they'd like. Or in another example, a plantation owner lined up three islander laborers and asked them in English, "are you happy? Are you getting enough food? Would you like to keep working?". And they said yes. But then the person there asked them in their language and they said no, please take us back to Tanna. And why, maybe I'm kind of at length, just really inspired by you, Emelda, is that the question, the deceptions in language, the different interpretations that can present themselves in that situation are precisely what's kind of returning in the current context. I mean, can you talk about the Nakamal?

Emelda: So the Nakamal is the hut where the Chiefs sit to drink their Kava and they gather to make decisions. So my name, Wasakum, allows me to stand in the Nakamal as one of the Chiefs to speak amongst the men or the Chiefs, whereas the women usually sit on the

peripheral. But anointing me with that custom name by the Nikolatan chiefs from Tana gives me the right to take my grievances to and stand in the Nakamal. Which I've used.

Dash: Yeah, I can imagine.

Emelda: Especially in Vanuatu, when we did the first response stuff from ASSIPJ Australia to the Cyclone Pam Disaster and one of the chiefs wanted all six containers that we went over [with]. We went there with Rainbow Warrior, Action Aid Australia, and I flew in and this chief said, "I want" - and they can do that - "those containers". And I'm like, "hell no, I'm Wasakum, we need a meeting ". So we went to the village and I sat there amongst them. The women all sat on their thing watching me, and I sat amongst the men. I said, and I didn't speak Bislama, "I don't know what your challenges are, but this is a gift from the Australian people and it must be shared. It's not for one particular group of people, it's for all provinces".

Dash: It's a position that you hold, between so many communities, but also geographically as this kind of intermediary - it's an interlocutor between. The responsibility lands on you. It's precisely that what wasn't there in the histories we're talking about, in the political events that we're describing, the absence of this intermediary, or the lack of [a] someone with responsibility to the community that's leading to this returning, repeating catastrophe, in other words.

Emelda: Some nights when I'm sitting and I'm writing - I can smell smoke. It's more than just this lived experience. It's a whole ancestral spiritual journey that I've been on for the last 15 years. And I get a strong, strong smoke smell. And I was just like, well, is that psychological? Am I thinking too much? And stuff like that. But when I spoke to people about this in particular from Vanuatu, our cultural advisors, they said, no, this is because, I don't even know if my grandfather smoked, but either way...

Dash: There's got to be something there

Emelda: Very strong and it'd be early hours of the morning and stuff like that. It was really powerful. And that's when I spoke to Aunty Shireen Malamoo, she said you're being guided. It's ceremony. It's something that's happening to guide you throughout the journey that we're on. And it really has kept me going. Hope is a beautiful thing. That our people for the recognition of Australia South Sea Islanders from the Tweed only had hope. And they worked with community [and] they made sure they built relationships, and that Chindera mob led that cause. And they led it across. So once the 67 referendum happened, that's when Faith switched back

[...CUT...]

Dash: But you mentioned Shireen Malamoo just now, a prominent artist. Have you found this experience, these kinds of histories reflected in art, in literature, in culture? What can that offer that, for instance, let's say a political discourse or a straightforward history, what those limits might be? What can art do in helping reflect the kind of understanding that we are talking about?

Emelda: Well, again, that's ancestral and spiritual. Aunty Shireen Malamoo is one of our first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander commissioners, female commissioners. She made great strides and lengths for this city of Sydney in particular, having lived here for 40 plus years, bringing the preamble into the city of Sydney Council, that Australia, or that Sydney, was invaded. She's a no-nonsense woman, and she paints the women at the well, which is her growing up at Plantation Creek. And these women emerging spiritually when she's painting and seeing them standing by a well or some sort of body of water. And that's always been her guidance. She paints them prolifically, also, as it comes for different experiences in her life. There's one particular painting she gave me where she painted her just after her son passed, and she called it "Floyd," but it was very dark and green, and it was warm but still. And then there's another one called Humanity. DFAT purchased a couple of photos to hang in the Hall of Justice or something over in Vanuatu. But Aunty Shireen Malamoo, Faith Bandler, Evelyn Scott, are all key advocates who are Australian South Sea Islander descendants, as well as, obviously Aunty not, but also Aboriginal descent. And they were leaders for the Aboriginal movement. [...] So they played a key role in advancing Aboriginal affairs in Australia. Sol Bellear...

Dash: Yeah

Emelda: Sol's from Tweed, but it's just mentioned [that] they are South Sea. But in terms of what they've done, Faith Bandler said to her one day, 'why don't you do something for our people?' Because of her positioning in the Aboriginal and the political framework, because she was meeting prime ministers, etcetera. Ernie Bonita Mabo, another one. But at the same time, during this journey, I found out that Ernie, Shireen, and I [are] actually related [as] she's got a Santo. Her Grandma Pula was a Santo as well.

We used to go, as a child, up there, but it wasn't spoken because you're a child, you don't speak, you listen. And we used to go up a lot to Ayr and the Burdekin. That's our family connection up there. But I haven't been able to immerse myself in it because it's a financial experience. You have all of this other stuff to enable this kind of work.

Dash: Yeah, exactly. And for the face-to-face connections that are kind of needed.

Emelda: Yeah. But the stories are there. The stories sit there and people talk about it. I've been talking to the Maritime, what do you call it?

Dash: Maritime Museum?

Emelda: No, down in Canberra for the War Memorial.

Dash: I've walked past it a thousand times.

Emelda: So just talking to them about the Indigenous Michael Bell, who's down there, just talking to him about recognition for South Sea Islanders as part of World War I and II.

Tweed have a lot of images in their little historical society thing, a room they've got established up there. But yeah, Auntie Shireen has been a huge influence on me, my mother, of course and the work that she has done.

Dash: Black Theatre too

Emelda: Yeah, and the nursing that she did. Achieving her nursing certificate at the age of 16. And my Auntie May being the first black nurse to graduate in Australia. It's before the First Nations Nurse. You know what I mean? And it's still not..

Dash: Wouldn't be known. Would definitely not be in textbooks, because these things work on different histories.

Emelda: Yeah, I don't know. There's so much. I think my strengths in this are the networking for the political movement.

Dash: Absolutely.

Emelda: Definitely the networking and the ability to transcend some of the challenges in having to engage with broader communities.

Dash: And with the method of that group of people: the Belliers, the Bandlers, the Malamoos, Scott Mabo, the knowledge of intra-indigenous connections and those kinds of communities and working cross-sectionally as you do. Maybe this is kind of time for us to maybe zoom out. I was going to talk about truth telling and repatriation over the next little while. What does truth telling mean for Australia today? What forms can truth telling take? I mean, we've been talking about history, we've been talking about politics, we've been talking about art, for instance, we could talk about academia and its role, the people like me, for instance, or community historians? What does, maybe speaking broadly, what does truth telling mean at this juncture? I mean, following the voice referendum, looking forward, and in the current government too, with the Labor government seemingly set up for the next two terms perhaps. What's the path look like and what form does the truth telling take?

Emelda: I think the shackles need to be off when it comes to truth telling. In terms of [it] from the Government level, I think there needs to be more flexible policies to allow the truth telling to happen. So being able to lead from a First Nations perspective, being able to, I know we've got our Prime Minister, I know all of that. Our Minister for Indigenous Affairs, but at the same time, at some level, they still control the community, and there's not enough flexibility there unless you meet their guidelines. So with Australian South Sea Islander in particular, I think they're scared of reparations and having to revisit this whole other journey when we're already on the First Nations journey, and you've already got a lot of South Sea Islanders as part of the First Nations journey, right? Thomas Mayer, Megan Davis -

Dash: Who are involved - I mean Megan Davis -

Emelda: Yeah and, I mean for me, to ignore that South Sea History as part of such a critical political time for our country is gut-wrenching. I was very upset at the fact that we weren't even considered.

[...CUT...]

Emelda: Pastor Ray Minniecon, who's Gurang-Gurang South Sea, he stood up and spoke about [how] if we're looking at treaty, what does treaty look like? Because that's a Lore framework. What does that look like for Australian South Sea Islanders? Because we need to be considered as a part of that treaty, because we were posted on those mission stations, plantations, and absorbed under those Aboriginal protection acts. So how do you speak to that and give people the freedom of identity? Because Lore, if you are adopted into a community, you are that community. It's not about the blood that runs in your veins, it's like adopting a child from an orphanage, right? That's your child. They're entitled to these rights and identity and cultural experiences. So why are we pulling out, segregating, when it suits us and all this sort of stuff, or marginalizing, when it suits us? Why are we not being true to custom law, Lore? It's like [a] Vanuatu saying, "This is your custom name, Wasakum, that's anointed," they respect that. I am Tanna by Santo. They don't need to see no paperwork. They know the story, the names are there. It's sufficient, I guess, what do you call it when you investigate people's identity?

Dash: Like a paper trail?

Emelda: Well not even a paper trail. It's just the narrative, the names.

Dash: About ancestry?

Emelda: Yeah

Dash: Like you say the name and it's like, okay, a spatial history, it's familial, it's relationship-driven.

Emelda: Yeah, and it's custom law. So my mother's name was Kayas. Auntie Phyllis was Natuka. Auntie Joyce was Yoma. Uncle Bill, Uncle Jim was Narlene. When I said those names when I went to Vanuatu, they were like, "oh yeah, we know where you're from". That's the village, Lenakel is the village in Tanna. Lenakel. Never been to Tanna, can't afford it yet, but anyway. But yeah, stuff like that, and with Terry Santo, my great-great grandfather, we're still searching. So I'm investigating through the Torres Strait. Virtually everyone up there is South Sea descendants from blackbirding, and they all live and breathe and collect their own memorabilia. They have surnames like Malakula, etcetera, so they know, but it's not spoken about. But we are the Melanesian region.

Dash: I want to pick up the point about shared space and the missions too. I was thinking about this for years. I worked quite a bit with Lionel Fogarty, the poet, from Yugambah, Kujjela, and

Mununjali kinship. Born on Cherbourg Reserve, used to be Barambah Reserve.

Emelda: Cherbourg?

Dash: Cherbourg, yeah.

Emelda: The ration shed.

Dash: Yeah, that's right.

Emelda: They all talked about being South Sea, Palm Island. These were all settlements.

Dash: That's right -

Emelda: And they all know.

Dash: He has a poem called "The Slaves are Her People" and it's about his experience of his mother, who says, "well, yeah, I've got South Sea Islander heritage," but the poem goes on and suggests that she disavowed it for years - she hadn't talked about it - but it kind of comes to define this idea of identity for Lionel, which is much more, kind of, expansive.

Emelda: Yeah, that's important. That'll be a very powerful story.

Dash: Yeah, that's right. And it kind of sits outside of the official record. There are accounts of Thursday Island being basically the exodus of people out. That island was evacuated in the Second World War, and they were placed in Cherbourg. So it's like you could think, well, is that the historical connection that's referenced? But then the point of the poem, I think, is that this is kind of a commonplace that's always been happening. It's just not recognized.

Emelda: No, it's not. And Palm Island -

Dash: Yeah! I was thinking about the Maza connection through the National Black Theatre, that kind of crew.

Emelda: Bob Maza.

Dash: Yeah.

Emelda: They were all part of my life here through the Black theatre. And they all traveled to America to investigate the Black Panther movement. And they brought that back, and the Aboriginal Medical Service was born. Carol Johnson was very much a part of that, but they're writing her out of the narrative. And that's why my film, called "Black is Inclusive," - I did a trailer, we got funded, [but] they wouldn't progress it. I'll send you the link.

Dash: Yeah, I'd love to.

Emelda: Black is Inclusive

Dash: Do you speak about Carol Johnson?

Emelda: It's the Carol Johnson story because she needs her story told.

Dash: That's fantastic -

Emelda: Adrian Wills was the script writer, and they just took it all and created a whole bunch of other stuff.

Dash: Oh my god. I know exactly the meeting you're talking about, about investigating the Black Panthers. I forget, is it McGuinness who goes over there? And basically he has this encounter that - you know Quito Swan? He's from Bermuda, a historian.

Emelda: I think I do, yeah, is he in Melbourne? No?

Dash: I think he's based in the States. But he wrote a book called the "Pasifika Black". And in that, he talks about the meeting that McGuinness, Johnson, and Maza had in going back to the States after Karamakefago comes to Melbourne for that first big [Black Panther] powwow. And there's this kind of encounter that they have where someone kind of insinuates that they are black, and then they - I think it's McGuinness who says, "The sooner you start understanding that we're Aboriginal," the first part, then discussion and dialogue can happen. And it's like where it's the same thing playing out across these different, very progressive spaces. But yeah, the kind of location where people are from mainly. I kind of want to pick up maybe on the repatriation point too. I know that you've worked with the Australian Museum.

[...CUT...]

Can you speak to the significance of repatriating objects in tandem with repatriation as wealth? Basically, just a small historical little footnote, as opposed [to] here, one of the greatest travesties, one of the greatest catastrophes, in what is already a very horrific history is that on deportation, the money that was used to orchestrate that came from the wages of deceased laborers.

Emelda: Was it five shillings or five something they had to pay?

Dash: That's right.

Emelda: Look, how the advisory, or the advisory panel, to the Australian museum came about was because it was raised with me that they were putting all of our relics out into a bunker in Rydalmere. Now the traditional lands of Rydalmere- Rydalmere I think it is a floodplain - it was

raised with me discreetly through people that were at the museum. And I wrote to [...] and I just asked why, as stakeholders, you haven't advised us in relation to these relics being moved out to make way for the Egyptian exhibition, right? Yeah, remember Tutankhamun or whatever.

Dash: Yeah, I know exactly what you're talking about. That just happened.

Emelda: So she, I guess, acknowledged that and asked me in for an interview, so I went in with a team of people. That's all on Facebook, too, as well. Either way, out of that came a Pacific Advisory panel. Basically, it was a tokenistic gesture as far as I'm concerned. And because the collection is 90% Melanesian, I asked for it to be appropriately managed by someone who has the experience and the cultural understanding, etcetera. But they chose someone else [...CUT....]

Dash: Maybe, kind of thinking about the maritime museum, the relationship you've had with them and repatriation or engaging with [the] community can take so many forms. What was that process of dialogue like, and how, maybe in the background, if there's a blueprint or something, what is a good example of an institutional engagement with this history, or the bare minimum for addressing this?

Emelda: We need our own space. We need our own cultural hubs that can actually be recognized. And that's what this peak body is all about for Australian South Sea Islanders, that we applied to Home Affairs and Multicultural Australia for. We need a peak body that's going to be able to negotiate with the government as to what that cultural framework is for a cultural hub based here in Sydney, even potentially on the Sugar Wharf or within an institute.

[...CUT...]

Emelda: We need our own leadership in that space. We have the credentials, we have the personalities, we have the academics. But the challenge here is the authenticity around that, because a lot of people haven't necessarily, as Australian South Sea Islanders, lived in the Pacific or really truly understand that cultural... the cultural nuances. And we have, again, our own people with the desktop research and the notion of what our cultures are. And we have Australian South Sea Islanders with a contemporary, obviously, culture created through our existence in this country. So what does this look like in partnership with other Pacific nations? And then we start talking about or setting up like a Melanesian spearhead group, but something with the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat. What could that look like in terms of leadership? So you've got your government leadership, you've got your cultural chief, whatever that looks like, leadership. You've got your grassroots historians, you've got the administration side of it. I know it's big, but it's possible. If you've got [the] budget, you can do it.

Dash: That's exactly right.

Emelda: And you've got to have vision, and you've got to have collaboration working with allies to actually put [it] together. We need to manage our own database resources as well, and look

at how that's shared. Because some stuff is taboo. Some stuff is okay for the public.

Dash: And some [thing] that the public should have heard about yesterday because it is so pertinent.

Emelda: And in looking at starting small, we need to look at the existence of Australian South Sea Islanders, because how do you have social justice access and equity for Pacific Nations without looking at the history of this country? The same with the PALM Scheme. How do you better that PALM Scheme unless you engage with the people who've already got the lived experience and that are coming to the aid of our people in those communities because of their experience of blackbirding.

Dash: Yeah, that's right.

Emelda: Or because they are descendants of, or they have this notion of what was, right? Because it's ingrained in our DNA, because we're a result or a product of that. So whatever that looks like.

Dash: For better. Or the Constitution of Australia, the Federation of Australia, around deportation, around blackbirding, you'll be forever tied to it. I mean, you made me think about setting a budget around this. It's also you're kind of investing in a relationship, which in other ways will just be kind of.... not meaningful is the least meaningful way of talking about it. But basically, Australia is the Pacific. It is Australasia. So, this is your history.

Emelda: And it is home to the largest Melanesian population outside of the Melanesian Islands. And they undermine the Melanesian region. So, also, that access to Pacific visa quota and things like that need to be implemented here for Melanesian countries. It needs to be a part of this people-to-people step up, whatever bullshit they're rolling out with the Nakamal agreement, etcetera. You could do a pilot program with Vanuatu to give - oh, well, I think they are - 3000 the Pacific Lottery visa or some shit like that. But either way, it needs to be a bit more forthcoming and transparent and supportive, because if we're family and we're [an] ingrained family in this country, we are the first seasonal workers, then that needs to be recognized and acknowledged, because they teach blackbirding in Vanuatu schools. So what's going on here? The kids are growing up with this narrative, but they come here and it's ignored. No one knows about it.

Dash: Just to reinforce that, I mean, having gone all the way through Australian schooling, there's not a trace [of] this kind of history. You have to kind of...

Emelda: Dig for it!

Dash: Even in your university, there are select pockets or in specialized areas. Maybe, kind of picking up [on] this, Australia's relationship to the Pacific, I'm really thinking about how places like Papua New Guinea, as well, have been implicated in Australia's interest in securitization, in basically its attempt to push out its offshore processing onto the Pacific. What connections do

you see between displaced migrant workers and indigenous peoples across the region more broadly? I mean, do you see any kind of traces of the same experience, or what ethos does it apply to connect with, for instance, to consider the place of - I'm just thinking of like asylum figures in, for instance, in places like Manus and Nauru when they were active, once managed by Papua New Guinea and its government or paid for by the Australian government. And you have all these kind[s] of very - we're talking about third-party responsibility before - it's kind of a similar dynamic in that it's this abdication of responsibility, but it's, again, it's Australia pushing its interest onto the Pacific without meaningfully engaging with its own history as a Pacific nation. So maybe the question really is, what patterns do you see, or what connections do you see from your own experience to others? Does that make sense?

Emelda: There's already remnants of our people sitting in Levuka, for example, who were descendants of blackbirding. And they built the capital city, which was Levuka at one point. Our Kanakas was sitting over there, still fighting for social justice, [and] recognition, as we are. They're not entitled to any lands or anything, but they're still, just like Australian South Sea Islanders, displaced peoples and considered migrants. But the history is blackbirding. So there's Samoa and New Zealand that have these people, so it's just more of the same. And the thing is, governments will continue to ignore what they see as a too-hard basket. When, really, it is... I think the PALM scheme is really highlighting, and Vanuatu in particular, the advocacy that we've done politically, with Vanuatu as our cultural advisors, has really brought the PALM scheme to the fore, because the high commissioner has played a key role over the last five years in supporting and endorsing the advocacy work of Australian South Sea Islanders Port Jackson. Ralph Regenvanu has played a key role in introducing Australia South Sea Islanders to the AAPS [Australian Association for Pacific Studies?].

Dash: Yep.

Emelda: When I first spoke in 2011 and the One Talk journey that we embarked on as an extension of that, getting funding off Prime Minister and Cabinet to run the One Talk series, which was seven conferences on 50 grand, and the rest was goodwill from across the nation - and bits and pieces from council.

Dash: Bits and pieces you can do with those.

Emelda: But I think Vanuatu leads in this space. They lead in the space of climate action as well. And I think they can play an integral role across the Asia, or the Pacific region, or Pacific nations, because, as does the Vanuatu High Commissioner in Canberra, he plays a key role as a part of those heads of mission in getting them on board with geopolitics, understanding the international labor laws, and what United Nations human rights looks like for our nations and our social justice needs and inclusion. But, with that, the preamble needs to be [an] acknowledgement of Australian South Sea Islanders and what occurred, because Australia's trying to create this new narrative around "people-to-people, and they're our neighbors" and all this shit when we've had this 178-year relationship. So, they need to fix that.

Dash: Couched in the language of 1980 suburbia - the backyard, the neighbor.

Emelda: That's all bullshit.

Dash: Yeah, that's right. It's part of the creation of an outside territory. It's all still consolidated. This white Australian mythos of, here's, let's just say, continental Australia, and there [are] its exterior territories, it's kind of, again, an abdication of responsibility.

Emelda: Well, when Albanese says no one will be left behind, that's what I tweeted, because, hello? Queensland's progressive in a certain way with what's occurred because of the Brownie points, the numbers. The Australian Bureau of Statistics needs to do a detailed assessment of Australian South Sea Islander communities. What that looks like is culturally appropriate, funded models for people, as they did in the 1992 Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission; culturally sensitive, funded, empowered, and led for the people, by the people, in collaboration, to assess, [and] reassess the demographic without discrimination. Making sure that it's either a confidential assessment or... because, when we did the 2016 advocacy around the Australian Bureau of Statistics, including Australian South Sea Islanders, we had [a] 138% increase in participation, because that question was there. But the silly thing they did was - and this is what I said to them - Australian South Sea Islander refers to a timeframe in Australia's history, 1847 to 1908. So, people born in Australia who are from the South Sea or Pacific, are probably ticking that box saying they're an Australian South Sea Islander.

Dash: That's true.

Emelda: So it's got to be targeted, it's got to be personalized, and it's got to be led by trusted leaders. Even Clive Moore said, when he was listening to some of my tapes or recordings of my thesis, he said, "Emelda, you speak a certain way with me, but when you sit with your people, there's a shift. There's a shift in language, there's a shift in openness." And that was something that was also identified with him and Max Quanchi's 1970 tapes, where they recorded us [as the] first generation.

Dash: I know -

Emelda: And he's saying, and I remember listening to my nana, and she said, "oh, I hope I'm not going to get in trouble for this."

Dash: Oh God.

Emelda: You know what I mean? So that's the difference, the power dynamic between an academic, white academic, and Australia[n] South Sea Islander. I feel comfortable talking to you because I've got nothing to lose, but people in communities have a fear of authority, or they see you as something else.

Dash: That's right.

Emelda: So there's a different kind of understanding. But mob, everyday mob, are just like, say, oh yeah, no shame. And [they] really pull back and don't particularly articulate or understand some of the questions or where you're going with stuff. But it's interesting, and that's why self-determination is so key to success.

Dash: It has to be historicized, that dynamic, too

Emelda: Has to be what?

Dash: Historicized, basically placed in context. As you were talking, I was thinking about Tracy Banivanua Mar, she talks about the early testimonies of South Sea Islanders who are basically participating in legal proceedings to [convict] all these blackbirding captains and the plantation owners who landed up in court for the abuses they were guilty of. The testimonies that emerge are exactly framed as you're talking about; there's a framing of the South Sea Islander voice always in this kind of deficit. But just like your point, like the contracts that we're talking about between PALMs and blackbirding, the testimony and the voice, it's a historical problem in Australia...and listening.

Emelda: Even when we were travelling and interviewing and talking to people with DFAT right? So this is a big bloody entourage, and they're like, "oh no, we're going to fix this. We're coming with you and all this shit". So I went with the high commissioner... I just get frustrated, sorry, I shouldn't be swearing... but I went with the high commissioner, we went to Gin Gin, we went to Tully, we went to the Burdekin, Cairns there, all these...driving. It was such a hard slog, but when we went with DFAT, everyone was on their best behavior, and they're all acting a certain way. When the High Commissioner and I would just rock up and say, "Hey, we're meeting here at this time," and it's on Facebook, hundreds of people come out to listen. But it's this power dynamic that's the challenge for our people. And our people are very submissive. You know the culture for Pasifika. It's all, you know, very spiritually soft and generous and open and come and sit and break bread, you know, all that stuff. So taking that into the colonial framework of, I guess, government, and I guess how you operate business under a Westminster system and stuff like that, is the challenge. So decolonizing some of this process and what that looks like is going to be the biggest challenge, because cultural framework is key, and that's what we keep talking about to DFAT. We have to have a cultural framework that speaks to the people if you want to get successful outcomes. Example, as I was ING media's senior producer for the National Indigenous Ear Health campaign, because of my experience in media, and I did that campaign [focusing on] middle ear infection in communities, remote communities, travelling all across Australia

Dash: Yeah, I remember hearing about this.

Emelda: And the mere fact that I was a Black woman sitting in front of mob and talking about the best way to go about producing your content, we had a 90% success rate in content being produced for radio stations. Whereas, if my employer would've gone in there, they would've

been pushing shit uphill. But it's the manner in which I conducted myself, how I worked with the community, sitting down, having yarns, all that stuff that takes time in order to get there. Whereas, working under this system, you don't have time. It's deadlines.

Dash: Yeah, totally.

Emelda: All that sort of stuff.

Dash: It's why I'm thinking about, for instance, the children of the *Sugar Slaves* thesis, but also the *Sugar Slave* documentary. Why those kinds of productions, those pieces of writing, are really valuable, because they operate as that kind of intermediary between the systems we're talking about. I mean, it's still written in this kind of - often an institution that - is totally exclusive.

Emelda: Right

Dash: Or who has access to these kind[s] of things, or who is it written for? But that's the kind of material that I think will get more and more important.

Emelda: And my opinion is...and I know Trevor Graham. I know Trevor Graham, who did *Sugar Slaves*. I worked at ABC for 10 years, so that's where I met him. And basically, he gave me the script, and I could put it on the website and all the rest of it. But I said to him, what you've documented is still the same in 2022 or three, or whatever year it was I was talking to him. I said, it's the same story, it's the same narrative. People wanting to go home. We're trying to do dual citizenship at the moment. I've got my dual citizenship through ancestral connections, through my grandfather. But we're looking at trying to set it up where we're working with the Vanuatu cricket team and trying to recruit Australian South Sea Islanders to participate as a part of the cricket team, [and] young people, and then they get their dual citizenship so they can contribute, take skills back, [and it] only costs them a \$500 administration fee to get your passport and everything, and they can start rebuilding their lives and connections. Because I approached Link-Up, you know, the Aboriginal Link-Up for finding families.

Dash: Yeah, yeah.

Emelda: You think they'll talk to me?

Dash: No, right.

Emelda: I'm not trying to dismantle anything. I'm just trying to be a part of the whole First Nations first strategy, and I think they're taking it on because they are now including [a] First Nations ambassador across the Pacific and all of that, but, again, the depth of his understanding about Australian South Sea Islanders..

Dash: Yeah, that's right

Emelda: [That] is the challenge. You need a first Australian South Sea Islander commissioner.

Dash: That's right.

Emelda: I'd be happy to do that job. But they don't like me.

Dash: Maybe after this interview they'll change their mind.

[...CUT...]