

Embau Moheni [EM]: Okay, for instance, we have myriad problems facing the society. What are the underlying factors? Oh the PNM [People's National Movement] is bad! Oh the UNC[United National Congress] is corrupt! Oh the—

But we do not know— because the UNC, the PNM, the police service, these are products of the system that we live under. And your actions today would have ripple effects for years to come, okay? For example, you know, we talk about a democratic society, we have, you see, we abuse these words, you know, like the West, oh, Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East, you know, and it was just a set of crap, you know, this time.

How are you going to tell me we are living in a democratic society, and yet you are preventing ideas from coming out just because it comes from a particular sector, from a particular individual, from a particular organization? I could remember, I was almost, I was actually arrested for subversive literature, but it confused the police to the point where they just released me. I was walking, I'm from Tobago, and I was walking through Calder Hall, where I spent a large part of my life, well, large in those days.

And I had a book, it was a Time magazine, but emblazoned across the cover was a picture of Mao Tse Tung, who was the leader of what they would have called communist China. So he was a communist. So they were taking me down, this is subversive literature.

Now, how could you have subversive literature in a democratic society, where in that society it is not a question of [slaps table] you must listen to me, it's a question, everybody has a free freedom to speak, put out their ideas. As a matter of fact, Mao Tse Tung had it clearer than all of them. He said, let 100 flowers blossom, let 100 schools of thought contend.

So you bring all, and then we sift them through, right? The people must be informed, and they say, look, of all of these, we want this one. Not because America tells you, "These are communist countries do not accept their ideas."

But before they reached very far, with the arrest that they implemented, one of them said, but when you look at it, it's a Time magazine. So that created a mental problem, because Time magazine is from the United States, where they worship. Mao Tse Tung is a communist, but it was written by Time magazine. So they were like, what to do? Okay, I think you could go ahead. So I was saved by the US [United States of America].

Avah Atherton [AA]: So you were officially arrested for that? Or you were just stopped on the street?

[EM]: I was arrested, but they had a magazine and they were looking at it, and one of them said, but wait, this is a Time magazine, and they knew Time magazine from the United States. And at that point, there was confusion between the four of them. And one of them said, no, you better just release him, because if it is a Time magazine that is not subversive.

[AA]: So you said that you were from Tobago. Can you give us a little bit about your background? Because when they talk about the movement, it's focused on areas in Trinidad.

[EM]: When who talks about the movement?

[AA]: Literature, articles, records of the movement.

[EM]: You see, in those same articles I put in, I did 12 articles in 2020 that appeared in the Express every Wednesday, except Divali. From the 26th of September, leading up to the 12th of December, which was, I think, maybe the last article, either the 12th or so. Because the 12th of December is one of the days that we recognize, one of our important days.

You have the 26th of February, the first one. Then you have the 12th of March, which is the march to Caroni, which was to unite. Because from the time the Chief Servant realized what they were doing, this Black Power thing, he said, look, we need to go to Caroni before they push the chasm.

And that was one of the most tormenting marches of all. They did not want unity. How the hell are you going to build a nation by creating divisions? That is where we are. But people don't know that. So we just grew up in an age and believe the nigger don't like the coolie. The coolie don't like the nigger. They went out of their way. And it's a legacy of the colonial system.

Because the British said, okay, right, these people are getting freedom. They will have a little too much power. Let's create a counterforce. And they started to bring the Indians, right? So they laid the groundwork. They laid the foundation for it.

And the Indians were not allowed to leave the plantation without a pass. So you kept them separated. The Indians used to have the Hosay Festival every year. Is it the Hosay? I think it's the Hosay. And the Africans added gravity towards it. So they banned it because they did not want the races coming together, right? And yet you hear people... I, to be honest about it, I am unsympathetic.

Because to me, this is not an intellectual exercise. This is an exercise in people's lives. And this is why I say that, you know, I was just trying to look at, you know, the concepts. You know, we are taught it's quite okay, you know, to be selfish. How could we live in a society? How could we call it a community?

Comm, comm means it comes from... Comm comes from 'commune', being together in a space. And it is comm, which is commune, being together. And unity, being united in purpose and harmonizing and what have you. So community really means being together for the common good. Setting pathways that are common to all.

Developing something that all could benefit from. Yes, you're going to have the deviant points as you move. But how could you say we are living in a community and you are just trying to rip it apart? And the politics, the nature of politics in the country speaks a lot to it as well.

The government weaponized the military and protective services in this country, right? I was arrested by the police. I was tortured. Other members went through similar experiences. Some would have been killed. You know, as a matter of fact, I came just about this close to death.

No, seriously, because one of the officers, there are four of us who just wanted to arrest us. So we had a rally on the weekend, I think we were in Scarborough, possibly the Saturday

before the rally would have been the Sunday. So we just had flyouts that we were handing out, you know.

And they arrested us and charged us for obstructing the free passageway. But people, that's the way we used to advertise in Tobago, not just us alone. Why were not other persons arrested, you know?

But we were not really obstructing, so that was already a false charge. You know, persons are passing, you hand them one, you do not have to be blocking them and say, wait, wait, wait, you can't pass here until you take one of these. It was not anything like that.

And we were tortured. And one of these officers, not really senior senior, but a senior officer, he may have been either sergeant or inspector at that time. But he came and he told us, look, they plan to kill you all. Take you out and kill you around seven o'clock tonight. And he left because he wanted to be no part. He did not have the gumption to stand up and tell them, look, you can't do that, that is murder. So he just left.

And fortunately, right, because somehow I knew I was supposed to meet you 50 years after. So I decided I could not die. So a good friend of mine, Dr. Delpeche, came in and he posted bail for us. And as a doctor, he wanted to see what condition we were in. I do not know how he got the news. But either way, it was a real doctor that came because how could he have known what was taking place in the cell?

You know, and that is how we came out alive. As a matter of fact, even then we thought we were going to be killed because they didn't release us same time. About midnight, they took us into a lonely area in Belle Garden, which is possibly about 50 miles from Scarborough.

And told us, come out of the jeep, come out, you know, put us out. So we thought, well, OK, this is it, you know. And they just drove off and left us there. Started to walk back to Scarborough. But, you know, a lot of people knew us so car going down and you know, we realized who it was and this stuff and we got a lift into Scarborough. But I'm just showing you they weaponized them.

They made us the enemies just because we were seeing that we need to control our own resources. And yet from it, the country has benefited so much. Because at that time, over 70 percent of our best land in Tobago was owned by foreigners.

The government moved within that same year after the emergency, after we were locked up, they began to buy out estates from the foreigners. As a matter of fact, they purchased about 13 of the largest estates. And so the transit of the land back to our people began.

So we have benefited. Look at the amount of small businesses you have in this country. 1970 was called the year of small business. Because we were encouraging people get back in or get into business. We can't just be dependent. Right.

In 1970, the majority population, Indians and Africans, Indians own about 4 percent of the of the business assets. Africans about 3.8. So 70 became the year of small business. That is when black people, because the narrative then, black people can't run business.

That was the narrative. So don't even try. That is one. And then secondly, the banks would not give you money. They wouldn't let you to go into business. You want to buy a car? Yes. We were going to give you the fastest car so you can crash and mash it up. And have to come and buy another one. They didn't mind that. And 70, 71 was called the year of the cooperative. Because the cooperative movement just began to grow as well. Because we were talking collaboration, unity, teamwork. Right. So 71 became the year of the cooperative.

Right. And we were also talking about, we were also talking about building your own financial institutions. So that 72 was the year of the credit union. And at that time, it was more people oriented. Now it is more elite oriented or sometimes even PNM oriented like Eastern Credit Union. But at that time, it was more people driven and people oriented.

You all believe 70 was NJAC [National Joint Action Committee]. It was not NJAC. It was the people. You have it totally wrong. 70 was not NJAC. NJAC was the leadership. The revolution, that was my address at the conference last year. We had a conference up at UWI [University of the West Indies]. And my address was the revolution was the people and the people was the revolution. It was both ways. We couldn't do it without the people.

But our leader had this ability to enlighten. And he was different. He wasn't like Martin Luther King. "We shall overcome." Bullshit. The demonstration was a school [slaps table]. And those demonstrations were so huge that you have six, seven, eight microphones at different sections. And at every section, they are discussing. Not Black Power, as you believe. They were discussing life. The politics. The economy. Family life. How to bring up your family. Community spirit. These are the things. Well the chief was philosophy. How high is up.

Challenging the mind to think. That is what created 70. I could remember just in about a matter of three weeks. This is a new movement. In a matter of three weeks, I mean, the talk started to drift around. There is a new consciousness growing in the country. A new con—. Three weeks. The movement was on the road for 56 days. Not even two months. The crime rate in 1970 went down by over 50%. Would they come to NJAC and say "How did you all do it?" What could we do to deal with crime?

As a matter of fact, when the Chief Servant in the 80s saw the direction of the society and he said, the crime is going to spiral out of control. Right? Parents would not be able to protect their own children. They said, oh, NJAC is a prophet of gloom and doom. That's what they said. Today, we are reaping the harvest of that gloom and doom because they refuse to listen.

[AA]: Can we go back to what you were saying about the, you said four people were arrested when you were in Tobago. Yeah. You and four people?

[EM]: Three others. There was a brother named Marlon. But he was not from Tobago. As I said, we were having a rally. He had come over for the rally. There was another brother who came up. One of the leaders. His name would have been Ralston Granger. But he had changed his name.

It will come back to me. But he was not there. He was, he was, he was, he was not there, you know, giving out pamphlets with us. All right. But my brother was one who is Thuku Moheni, passed away in 2020. As well as Opuku Ware, who would have been the Tobago leader at that time. So that would have been the three of us, as well as this brother who came up after that. I think his name was Marlon. Yeah.

[AA]: How old were you then?

[EM]: I would have been 19 years of age.

[AA]: And that was the first time that you were arrested?

[EM]: No. The first time I was arrested was 18.

[AA]: 18? For subversive literature?

[EM]: No, no. That, that, well okay, I didn't, I didn't call, I was released at that time, before they reached the stations. I don't really call it consider it an arrest, but I was being arrested for the subversive literature. I was arrested for, for doing what I'm doing here right now. Doing what I'm doing here right now. Speaking.

And at that time we grew up knowing that you have freedom of speech. So it was kind of, you know, how could we be arrested for speaking? And well, we were not tortured that time, you know, but charges were brought against us.

And you know what? I sit back and I study. I'm not, I'm not going to blame the lawyer because he had a good name, as well as he had a relationship with the organization. But his name was Charles Tyson.

Now, we were speaking to some youths and some students. It was at the Scarborough Secondary School. The police came. They didn't listen to anything that we said. They just came and arrested us. But when they got to the station, they wrote out two speeches. One for my brother and one for myself. Now, a speech does nothing because the charge was "Creating discontent and dissatisfaction amongst Her Majesty's subjects." Because that was in 1972. That time we were still, the monarchs of England were still the heads of state in our country. So the Queen would have been our head of state so that we were subjects of the Queen. And we went about giving these speeches there and creating discontent.

Now, the argument being, regardless of what we say, that does not mean that anyone became discontented. So why did the lawyer not say what evidence you have? In addition to which, there was a young girl by the name of Junie Thomas. As a matter of fact, her father was one of the detainees in 1970 so that she was close to the Movement.

She wasn't in the movement, but her father is there, so she is not free. So when they arrested us, she said, let go of the fucking men! So she became discontented, not with us, but with the police.

And they brought charges of obscene language against her. Why did he not bring her there as a witness to show them who created the discontent? But the discontentment, the police

are the ones who created this, because otherwise, why the hell would they sit down there listening to us? They would have been, hey, all of you get out from here. If they were discontented, what nonsense are they talking? No, no, no.

It is when the police came, that discontentment came into the situation to the extent that one of the youths was actually arrested. Right? But we lost the case, and we had to pay some money. We spent about a week in the police cell until we got bailed. The same Opuku was arrested the second time. He went around until he got some of the bailers out.

It was like, you know, you needed land, because it was bail with assurity. That is how it was. When my father came and he was like, okay, we're going to bail you out, but you have to leave NJAC. I said, well, I didn't join this movement because of NJAC. My commitment is not necessarily to NJAC. It's to the people of this country. So I said, I can't do that. I'd be betraying the people. So he left.

He left with his bail. My mother, she was panicking. Who you afraid of? Like you join a gang, they will kill you if you leave? You know? And he said, no, no, no, he's not afraid of anybody. He has his principles. I have mine. And he left.

But in order to deter other family members, when he went home, he told my sister. Well, I don't know how he did it. But years after, my sister told me, that when he came home, he said, Embau believe he is Christ, he feel he could save the world. [laughter] You know, don't follow him, you can't save the world, you know? So it was interesting as well, you know? But I never held anything against him. And he never held anything against me.

You know, and afterwards, at first it was perplexing. But I studied afterwards, you know? If I remain in NJAC, and he bailed me out, in two weeks time, I might be back in again. He didn't want to be running up and down the place, you know? So you make up your mind, what pathway you want to take. If you want to take that pathway, fine. But I'm not going to be run around, run around every time you get arrested to come and bail you. I know where that is going to lead. And as he said it happened, they arrested me again, you know? As he thought. Well, he never said it. But it's afterwards that I figured it out. I said, you know, it really wouldn't make sense if you bailed me out, you know? He doesn't intend to be running up and down.

[AA]: So were there any other members of your family involved?

[EM]: Um, yeah, yeah. My brother, as I said, and my elder sister. My eldest sister, because both are elder. The other one, she, she can't because she, she's too nice. She like you. That jail would have killed her. But my eldest sister, she was, she was involved.

[AA]: So what started you on this? I shouldn't say what started you on this path, but what prompted you to, to make such public, you know—

[EM]: It was the Chief Servant, Makandal Daaga.

[AA]: Is it that you heard a speech from him?

[EM]: Yeah.

[AA]: He came over to Tobago? What was it?

[EM]: Yeah, it was, it was just, it was just by chance. It was just by chance. Because, um, both my brother and myself, we were the Tobago table tennis champions. Yeah. He was a champ from 71 to 76. I was a champion from 76 to 79. After that, the Chief Servant talked about a new government and we hit the road. So I just gave up the table tennis.

But what happened is that there was a youngster who borrowed my racket. Now your, your racket is a, it's something you don't normally lend. Because if there's a tournament and you are playing with another racket, the bounce, racket, the bounce is different. You have rubber and you have— rubber and you have sponge.

So the rubber is on the outside, the sponge is on the inside. Both have their own impact. The sponge would have a greater impact when you are hitting the ball hard, when you are slamming. Good. Because the impact is going to go through the, the rubber onto the sponge. Now there are some rackets, the sponge is fast. So when you hit it with the sponge, if you can't control this, that's going to go straight off the board. There are others, this, the rubber is fast. So as you do so, it just, it goes off. So when you go into a competition and you are not in tune with that, you're going to be making errors. So you don't want, so someone told me, he went down to the car park. So I went down there to look for him to get my racket.

I did not see him, but there was this meeting taking place. So I said, let me listen. So there are different speakers. And then they introduced someone by the name of Geddes Granger, because he wasn't Makandal Daaga then. And, that was it. You know, of all his speeches, that is the one I remember the most.

[AA]: Can you repeat some of it?

[EM]: I can, I can repeat the opening words. He opened by stating, when he was introduced, he said, I came to Tobago and as I walk around the place, I see barbwire, barbwire, barbwire. The barbwire was a symbol of the foreign ownership of land. And I say to you, my people, if you do not take stock of yourselves today, history will be harsh on you tomorrow. And as I see everybody shout 'Power', I shout Power too.

So that was my first introduction to NJAC. Now, I saw NJAC before that, because he didn't come to Tobago until April. So, my birthday is the 28th of February. The mass movement began on the 26th. So, they, they had a demonstration around Port of Spain, they went into the cathedral, and the police moved in and arrested them. No, they didn't arrest them.

They said that— Williams was a wicked son of a—. What does Williams do and the PNM? They send out propaganda, that they went into the cathedral, they desecrated the cathedral, they peed on the altar, they painted statues black.

All of that is a lie. They did drape two of the statues, the Virgin Mary and the statue of Jesus, they did drape it with black cloth. Nobody peed on no altar. But you see, and when the PNM go there with propaganda, it's all over the country. So Williams said, right, I have the opportunity to move in on these people now. And they arrested about 10 of the leaders.

So they didn't arrest them the 26th of February, the day when the demonstration took place, they arrested them early the next morning. So it did not come in like the Guardian newspapers until the following day. So which would have been, 26 was the demonstration, they arrested on the 27th. On the 28th, it was in the papers. So I could remember, I will never forget it either. I was reading the Guardian and on the front page, there was a picture of what was his name? Carl Blackwood and Geddes Granger. And I see these people have been arrested for this and I'm looking at these people in their picture. I said, no. I said, it's not going to work. That is not going to stop them. I just knew that.

I just knew it within my heart when I look at those two pictures. I said, that can't stop these men. That is not going to stop the movement. But then that went out of my mind because that time I'm a student. I was a student still. I was 16 years of age. I had exams coming up and you know, I just continued. And then I'd never said, you know, it went out of my consciousness. So I didn't go down the path because of NJAC. I went down there for my racket.

But then this meeting is going on and I was there for the meeting. And the Chief said was talking about Tobago having no media. We had no media. We had no Tobago newspaper. We had no Tobago radio, no television, nothing at all. And he said, we in Trinidad, we only know about Tobago when there's some big disaster like Hurricane Flora, which took place in 63, which was still vivid in people's minds. And within a short time, we had 610 Tobago being set up. These are the achievements of the movement. We had a Tobago newspaper coming out, right? And it is Makandal Daaga and NJAC that came and showed, well, look, this is ridiculous, right? So that was my first real encounter.

And the next day, I was in the demonstration down to Mount Irvine, where, when we entered the golf course area, we saw the disrespect. You know, people does talk this kind of crap, excuse the language. You know, oh Williams was this great leader. Williams went and opened that hotel for the foreigners. And we as Tobagonians, we couldn't go there, except as a caddy boy on the golf course or as a maid or a cleaner or something like that. We couldn't go there and say, look, we want some food or we want a drink.

No, it was whites only. And they were so powerful. Just imagine you as the prime minister opening that institution, right? And the British flag is flying above the Trinidad and Tobago flag. Well, I know the British will never forgive us for that. Because Carl Black— Baliss Frederick was the person on the microphone at that time. And he said, no, no, no, no, no, no. That's a disrespect of our nation. Take down that flag. And those days, there are those in the movement, a lot of them have fell by the wayside, but they had this militaristic thing in their mind. So they marched off with the flag [stamps feet]. They saluted the flag, all due respect. They took it down. They folded it and they threw it and they go and trampled it.

The British would never forget that. Forget that. Or forgive that. You trample. You know how a country is with their flag. So it is not surprising that these people moved against us in the way they did.

[AA]: Was there a large movement in Tobago?

[Em]: Huge. The mobilization in Tobago was even more than Trinidad, per size of population. Because remember Trinidad is a mixed population. At that time, about 95% or even more of the population was African.

[AA]: Because you said that the march in Tobago, they were shouting power, not Black Power, power?

[Em]: Yeah. No, all over the country is power, right? But the point being is that people knew about Black Power because Stokely Carmichael, as a youth growing up, I used to be reading about Stokely, and we were proud. You know, you read about Malcolm X, you're proud about it, you know? So Black Power was prominent, good? So it is easy for them to say, this is a Black Power movement.

[AA]: So what was the mood like in these marches?

[EM]: The mood was extremely enthusiastic. As I said, the people was the movement. The brothers on the blocks who was negative, their lives were transformed. They were in the demonstrations in the day, and they were studying under the streetlights in the night. And they were doing their posters and their whatever, banners and what have you to take to the demonstration.

But as I said, the demonstration was a school, right? So at different points, you had information being passed on. Theories, philosophies, et cetera, being passed on. So at the same time, you're having about six or seven meetings in one demonstration, right? Now, yes, there's the shout for power, good. But it wasn't like "we shall overcome". You walking and you saying one thing over and over. It was like information. It was like education.

It was enlightenment. And a new area because we were setting up different zones, right? And one of the first responsibilities they had, a new zone had, was to begin to bring out their own paper, right? So you're talking about new writers are emerging. New leaders are emerging. It was a mass movement.

[AA]: So within that year, what were your most memorable moments in the year of 1970?

[EM]: 1970, what was the most memorable moment? Boy...

[AA]: You were what? 19?

[EM]: 16. 16. I wouldn't say the most memorable moment. But the whole atmosphere was just electric. Just an electric atmosphere. You know, the transformation that is taking place. Like both of us not talking in the community, you know, but 1970 is talking about unity so we're going to talk again.

We put aside, you know. These are the kind of things that was happening. I've seen people like McCain, you know, who was just a wicked man in the community. With a big piece of wood in his hand. "Williams is a wicked man". But he was an advantageous person. But these people were coming to the Movement. Another memorable experience was a

gentleman by the name of Tony Rum. But when you hear that name, you know exactly who I'm talking about. Tony Rum. Rum.

I don't mean you know the person. But you would know he's an alcoholic. That's the point I'm making. I don't mean that you would know him. He died long ago. But the point from the time you hear Tony Rum. You done know. That's what I used to call him. From the time he get up in the morning. Where's the bottle? He's drinking. And he made that match to Mt Irvine, I think. And he took a pledge to put down the bottle. You see, the movement transformed people's lives as well. It got criminals off of crime. It got people off of drugs. It got alcoholics off of rum. So a lot of people talk about, oh, we transformed the economy.

But just the little human things that took place. People transformed their lives because they were seeing a new vision. A new hope. And he was one. Tony Rum. He used to be drinking from morning until night. Until his money finished, obviously. And he go by some place to go and trust. But that is him. Tony Rum. He put on the bottle and never picked it back up. He charted a new course in his life.

[AA]: And the composition of the matches. What kind of people that was?

[EM]: No, it was majority youth. But they were elders. He was an elder. They were elders as well. But the youths were the majority, right? And it is the first time in my life that I've heard expressions of women being in politics. Because at that time, politics was a man's job, right? So the movement— Kamla couldn't be Prime Minister if there was no 1970s.

You see, all you have to do is go back and do the research. When was the CXC [Caribbean Examinations Council] board set up? 1972. When was the Republican Constitution Committee set up? 1971. You just go back and you'll see the country began in 1971, in 1970. When did we have our first local and black Anglican bishop? 1970. When did we have our first local and African police commissioner, Jules Bernard? 1970.

You just go back and you will see. But these things are hidden from the population, right? So that you just, you just, we just, people just don't know. But all of this took part. All of this happened. Thousands of people were involved. But it has been erased from the collective consciousness of the population.