

PARENTING DECOLONIZED PODCAST



Ep #47: Decolonization: A Harm Reduction Tool for People of Every Color with Ira X Armstrong

Yolanda Williams: Welcome to the Parenting Decolonized podcast. I'm your host, Yolanda Williams, entrepreneur, Conscious Parenting coach and single mom to one amazing toddler. I'm on a mission to help shine the light on how colonization has impacted the black family structure. If you're a parent that wants to learn how to decolonize your parenting, you're in the right place. Let's do this!

Welcome back to the Parenting Decolonized podcast. I'm your host, Yolanda Williams, and today I have with me, Ira X. Armstrong. Thank you for being here friend.

Ira Armstrong: Thanks for having me Yolanda. You know I am glad to be here with you.

Yolanda Williams: I mean I appreciate you. Ira is one of the most like – nonjudgmental very supportive people that I have had the pleasure of meeting on the ghetto that is known as Meta.

Ira Armstrong: This is.

Yolanda Williams: I can get (indiscernible) (00:01:05) that we call Facebook, or we used to. Ira is a mixed black trans parent, a freedom fighter, working to create (indiscernible) (00:01:16) sustainability through social permaculture. Now, okay, when I read that I was like, "what is that, what does that even mean?"

Ira Armstrong: What does that even mean?! Right?

Yolanda Williams: Well, Ira help me out, what does that mean?

Ira Armstrong: Right. It's basically a fancy way of saying creating community by really paying attention to the way that the world is and following life and growing in the way that life grows, rather than following death and growing in the way that death grows and what I mean by death is not the cycle of life and death because death is part of that cycle, but I mean when death takes over, with things that are supposed to be alive, right? And so I think about things like, well, we

will (indiscernible) (00:01:57) back up a little bit. I grew up as the child of revolutionaries and abolitionists. My dad was a black panther in Los Angeles and he would go back and forth between Los Angeles and the Bay area and so I was born after the party was dissolved in Los Angeles, but I grew up in a family with black revolutionaries and white revolutionaries. My mom is a white abolitionist and she is (indiscernible) (00:02:21) generations of white abolitionists and so I thought growing up that the world was like our family, right? Like every child does whether it's, you know, for the first three years or the first five years or the first 10 years or the first 20 years, every child thinks that their world is the world, right?

And so in my family, it was normal to look at conditions that were happening in the world, see things that were just or unjust and continue what was just and discontinue or shift or resist depending on what was available, what was unjust. And so, for me, it's a way of describing to folks the fact that I didn't grow up in what a lot of people think of as sort of the normal American way of life, that I grew up as a freedom fighter, as someone who just believed in following life, whatever that looks like, whatever that needs.

Yolanda Williams: You know, it's really for me, just amazing. This is like, it has just been your life to be a revolutionary, to be around revolutionaries, to be around abolitionists, I am just getting started and I am just trying to figure out, like all the different ways to be and accept where I am while also like striving to be for my decolonizing journey. And as – and my abolitionist journey, I call myself a baby abolitionist or an abolitionist in training because let me tell you that carceral state, when you start the journey of becoming an abolitionist, you realize – you realize the (profanity), that is the carceral state and how much it is embedded into your mind. Because when something happens in our society, especially when it comes to racialized trauma, in my head, I am just like "ooh!!" "fight them (indiscernible) (00:04:20)" it's like – I just, I go to that place, the death place that you are talking about.

Ira Armstrong: Yeah, yeah, I hear you.

Yolanda Williams: That death place you are talking about. I don't want to be that way because I know at the very – even though in my heart, I know what the very core of it all, that it is not helpful to discard people, even the worst people. Now, some folks need to go away. Once I hurt children of mine, I am serious, I don't think they need to be like dead necessarily, but like if you are, like you know, someone who hurts children, like that kind of thing, I don't know if there is a deserted island they could be dropped off or they had to parachute down, I don't know. They need to get away from here though. That's what the (indiscernible) (00:04:56), but at the same time, I am like how do I make room for this type of thinking that's outside of the binary, you know, I want the carceral state to end, this present industrial complex is harmful for literally everyone involved, except for the people who profit from it. And actually, it's horrible for them too. But man, when some – when that kind of stuff happens, I just feel like that's the – it's like

inside of me, it's like a fight, like, well, what do you believe? And I am (indiscernible) (00:05:28) mumbles around just like I believe in a lot of things. And that's – I just leave it at that. I believe in a lot of things and I stopped feeling bad about it, you know.

Ira Armstrong: Ooph! I think that's so so deep, right?! That's (indiscernible) (00:05:40) way and I stopped feeling bad about it, because the shame is part of what perpetuates systems of destruction, right, destruction of humanity and the destruction of the Earth and welcome to the journey as an abolitionist.

Yolanda Williams: Right.

Ira Armstrong: My – so I grew up as an activist and I say that because that is what we call it from the outside, but I grew up with people who did not call themselves activists. They said things like activists are the people who hold signs on the streets. We just get stuff done. I just edited it myself.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah. (indiscernible) (00:06:19) but you feel free to head yourselves.

Ira Armstrong: So I think about that, right, like well, this is where I am now, right, and they also didn't use the word abolition in the same way that we use it now and before, at least not in my communities growing up, even though that's the work that they were doing, but again like some of that sort of perspective of like we are normal people who just want to be free.

Yolanda Williams: Right.

Ira Armstrong: And we're not trying to like change everything at all, we just want everyone to be housed, clothed, and fed. Right, like what does it take to get there and once we get there, if people want to stay, like, "oh, we still need jails," "oh, we still need this carceral system," "oh, we still need best this", then let's talk about it, right? But let's start with resource sharing, let's start with reparations, let's start with shifting from the place where like our entire economy was built on the backs of enslaved black folks and indentured servants from all over the world, right?

Yolanda Williams: Right, right.

Ira Armstrong: And the way that they kept indentured servitude and slavery in the United States was twofold, one by inviting people to take part in that colonization project, by either giving them land or giving them respectability or any of those things and also by shifting it so that the amendment says, "unless you are a criminal, you get to be free." Right? And so then you have to criminalize people in order to have that same slave workforce. And you know I'm working at a

school as an artist and activist in residence right now, and I'm talking to them about the Gullah-Geechee people and I want to give a shout out to Melanie Demore, who is an amazing mentor of mine and also to my uncle, Donald, who just passed, who is Geechee. And Melanie holds – is a culture keeper. She helps to tell the story of Gullah-Geechee and she holds these incredible stick pounding workshops that we participated in our group – our youth group in PEACE Out Loud and participated in a workshop with them this past fall, but if you don't know, the Gullah-Geechee are folks who were kidnapped from Africa, all over Africa, brought to what was not yet the United States, it was the colonies, or so-called colonies and places where indigenous Americans had already been killed and moved aside, and they were brought to farm the land and some of them managed to escape and create communities on islands in the Southern United States and some of them are still there and they have a whole culture of communication and rhythm and trickster work that they do in the world. And I think about like people don't have to call themselves abolitionist or activist or anything, it's about like who you are and what you do and in the moment, and what I always say is like the moment of oppression is the moment to resist.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah.

Ira Armstrong: And that's part of what my parents were doing then, right, like I wouldn't parent the way that my parents parented me, but the way that they parented was really revolutionary compared to the way that they were parented, right. And they talked about that and they talked about – they didn't use, you know, the language we have now, just decolonizing parenting, but they used the language of Khalil Gibran, right, the sweet honey and the rock made part of one of his poems into a song, "your children are not your children, they are the children, the children of Life's longing for itself, they travel through you, but they are not of you, and though they are with you, they belong not to you." And there's more of it, but –

Yolanda Williams: Beautiful.

Ira Armstrong: You know, they believed in following people who were helping them decolonize their parenting, and I benefited from that.

Yolanda Williams: And when I think about people like the Gullah-Geechee and their very being is so revolutionary, and we could think about, I mean we can go on and we can talk about that all day because they are the people who were able to hold on closest to like African traditions, and so I'm learning more about them as I decolonize, especially as I informed this intentional community because I am just like I want to go home, you know. Like I want to understand myself better and I want to understand some of these practices better, and again this is a decolonizing my mind from well, Christianity specifically, thinking about how people speak about them and how they continue to still like, "well, this is us", and this is – it's nothing evil

about it, we are just out here living our lives, living as close to, you know, African traditions as possible on US soil. And, you know, after I did my DNA test, which I did so I could understand like where the hell like, "who am I", you know, where did I come from. And I found out that I am I think 56% Nigerian, which I want to take another test because I – Nigerian is a colonized term, and I want to understand like exactly what tribe and all that stuff. And then I found that I was also like 24% European, and so I'm in a place right now and this is where again outside of that binary, like either/or thinking, it's all me.

So even though it like literally disgusts me to think about, like how that 24% got into my DNA, when I don't have relatives who are white, is still a part of me. And so I want to understand that part of me. I want to understand those traditions as well. I don't want to reject any part of me. And so I'm – just want to learn how to be at peace with myself and I want – obviously, this is so I can model this to my daughter, I can model this as something that is normalized in the women that I have around me in our collective, that we are willing to investigate even the parts of us that – the darker parts of us that that we may not want to go.

Ira Armstrong: Or the lighter parts of us.

Yolanda Williams: Or the lighter parts of us like all of us.

Ira Armstrong: Because I am down for embracing the dark, right. But sometimes the light is the part that it is.

Yolanda Williams: I will try to go to the light. I am just saying I want to also just be okay with all of it, you know, I want to know myself.

Ira Armstrong: You are – you have inspired me, I am going to have to do shadow reading for you sometime.

Yolanda Williams: Ooh, right!

Yolanda Williams: Now, the one thing you and I were talking about was just like, you know, full disclosure and I will put this business out just so folks can, I am sure the (indiscernible) (00:13:41) will resonate, I am in a space right now, where I'm trying to climb out of this depression that I am in. I have been feeling super exhausted, super retired, really just trying to figure out, okay, with all the stuff happening, you know, as I do this work and I don't think people who don't do this work understands how much it could actually weigh on you, because you look at the world differently and it's hard sometimes to find joy in things like I have to intentionally find the joy in moments because the world around feels so heavy to me and it's like the more you know, the more you hate here, have you all heard this?

Ira Armstrong: The more you know, the more you hate it. Yeah (indiscernible) (00:14:20).

Yolanda Williams: Because thinking just they are like, oh, that's connected too, that's – okay, that's why I find this person attractive, damn! Like, nothing seems real.

Ira Armstrong: I think there is like one of the things to hold, which is really hard to hold when you're in depression, or in finding out a lot of new information, but I think like this is part of why I appreciate like the work that I've done that allows me to have like an adult self that holds my – me through my journeys of wholeness and lack of wholeness and whatever that means, is to keep perspective, like, "yes, it does feel like that when you're pushing into new work," like everything is overwhelming, like – but at the other side of that is a place where it's actually more ease because if there is not, then that is a problem also, right. Like the point of this work is not to create a life where you're working so hard all the time that you can't rest. The point is to push through and get to that point and what I mean by push through, I mean it literally, right, as a permaculturist, I mean that literally, like the biochemical action that helps us like have anger or use our anger productively to, go to therapy or do decolonization work or any of the things that we're doing, that same energy is the energy that it takes for the seed to open, for the roots to push through the seed, or to push up out of the soil to be alive in the air and in the sunshine.

And so like when I say push through that's what I mean. Like there should be an effort that happens and then there should be a time when you get to grow for a little bit and just absorb those nutrients, right. And so like if you're tired, it's okay to rest, right, like I think about the monarch and their example, right. The monarch butterfly, when it's in its cocoon, right, after it like eats all the stuff and whatever, it goes and it like completely dissolves into its cocoon and then when it's warm enough, it comes out, right. Now, that cycle might be a week or so, it might be two weeks, but they can live I think up to a month without coming out of the cocoon to wait for the conditions to be right. And I just love that example of like it's okay to take my own time and to be ready when I am ready.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah, and I also want to just remind everybody that if we are really keeping it like decolonized, now winter months is not the time, it's like a time of rest. Like, cyclically, it is not the time to be birthing new things, like that's spring, okay. And so we are so far removed, a lot of us, from the cycles, natural cycles and we are wondering why we're feeling like everything we have the role of walk up-hills, because it is harder to – we're supposed to be resting and this is not saying like, "don't work." It is just saying like, you know, rethink your work, like do I really have to launch, like for me do I really have to launch this certification program, right now, or can I wait, you know, I am saying where there's more sunshine, where I am able to get out more, where I am able to feel more alive, like the sea pushing up through, you know, the soil, getting that energy from the sun, from the world around it and better able to

thrive under conditions of spring and summer, versus trying really hard right now and it feels like there's a lot of resistance. So –

Ira Armstrong: Well, yeah, I mean I think you're really touching on something that I've been trying to get back into over the last 15 or 20 years of my own life, is this idea of like aligning yourself with the seasons, wherever you are in the world and whatever that looks like, but I think part of what we're not used to is the harvest, right, like to have a harvest that is our own, that is shared in community, that is canned or bottled or put into a root cellar or whatever the things that we have, so that we have enough sustenance to get through the winter.

Yolanda Williams: Right.

Ira Armstrong: Right? So that we can rest because if you don't have that, then you don't have space to rest during those months.

Yolanda Williams: That's (indiscernible) (00:18:53).

Ira Armstrong: Right.

Yolanda Williams: And I guess, especially as we try to exist and resist, right, these capitalist ideals, we sought to live within it and so it feels like it's pressing down, but as far as speaking specifically for myself, I have to do a better job of preparing for the harvest or preparing for the winter months, like, you know, the damn chipmunks be doing.

Ira Armstrong: They are really good at it, right.

Yolanda Williams: They are really good at it, because I was just thinking about this, you know, I had a conversation with someone about this yesterday and I was like I want to start taking December and January off, like just put things on autopilot and just let things run themselves and rest, really, really lay my head down somewhere, okay. And that means that I have the intentional throughout the rest of the year to make sure I'm able to actually do that. And so after, you know, I get a little bit more energy that's going to be my intention because I want to be able to say, you know what, it's winter, I want to take it easy and have the space to do so. And it seems hard. We are conditioned to only see lack, to only see, you know, we're told that there's only a little bit. There's enough for everybody, it just doesn't feel that way because that's – it's not supposed to be the way.

Ira Armstrong: Right and that word conditioning is so important.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah.

Ira Armstrong: Right? I think writing a little bit about the difference between training and conditioning, and training is like wanting something and you sort of do it, but your conditioning is what you go back to, regardless of what your training is. And to recondition ourselves, we have to reset and sometimes that reset looks like not hustling, right, and when you live inside of a community of slave capitalism, right, where resources are hoarded by people who gain their wealth through the labor of other people, right, note nobody does enough labor in a lifetime to get to be a billionaire. There is not an amount of labor that you can do. So if you're a billionaire, you get your profiting out of other people's labor and that means that other people are not profiting off of their own labor and getting their own ability to store their own nuts, right?

Yolanda Williams: That includes black ones too you all. They don't get a pass.

Ira Armstrong: And so when you just stop, we have learned, we have been conditioned to know that what happens then is some sort of beating or death, right. So we have this generational trauma that is in our bodies that is the literal memory, right, and then we have the lived reality of life, maybe metaphorically beating you up, but I mean I don't know how close you have been to homelessness, but I've been unhoused in my life and it's no joke. To be unhoused against your will is no joke and so it's not just about like learning how to decolonize yourself, it's about like figuring out what the balance is for you between stopping and like shifting the world that we're in so that there is actual space and then once there is that space, what do we do with that, right. And a lot of us do just like go back to our conditioning and like whatever it is, but some of us are luckily exhausted and that's when our mitochondria sort of take over until we can like re-energize and hopefully that reenergizing is an actual time of re-energizing where you have, you know, safety and a roof and medical care and dental care and food and like nutritious food, right, that can be taken in.

Yolanda Williams: I have experienced the houselessness a few times when I was a child. And so I know. Part of what goes through my head is the trauma from that, like the effects of the trauma from that. So that is why I work the way I do. Because in the back of my head, I have to remind myself this is – I have to remind myself constantly, that's not going to happen. You're okay. So whenever something like, for instance, when I got COVID, and I couldn't work, I had to remind myself, you're going to be okay, you're not going to be houseless because that fear is real and if you haven't ever experienced that, and then you ended in, like especially as a child, you experienced it as a child and then you become an adult and that's always in the back of your head.

Ira Armstrong: Right, because it conditions you to that lack.

Yolanda Williams: Yes.

Ira Armstrong: To that fear.

Yolanda Williams: It does. And so you do things, you don't even realize you're doing them out of lack and it feels like you're not. It feels like no, I am working, I am working, so I am never houseless, but the underlying theme is not enough in this lack is fear and so the key is really recognizing where some of your habits come from and like the conditioning and then working to – you know, you really think about the brain as like a computer and all the conditioning as like a program. We have to like, you know, some of them need to be debugged and some of them need to be completely overwritten and uninstalled, okay. And that's one of them that I am trying to install and go ahead and install some new programming because it doesn't serve me at all. In fact, what happens is when I let myself spiral, what happens is that voice, I saying like that fear, it paralyzes me and it makes me stop working. See how that works, and I'm sure a lot of people do that, and don't even realize they are doing it. I get so overwhelmed with the fear, even though the thing that's going to keep you from doing, from being houseless or whatever, you can do it, because in that moment, you're so paralyzed with fear. So it really is about like recognizing that conditioning, the patterns and that's why decolonizing is more, I know I am going to piss some people off. For me – yeah, when I first started –

Ira Armstrong: I am ready, bring it on, I am ready.

Yolanda Williams: When I first learned about decolonizing, it was not from the land back perspective and I'm not saying, I have land back, right? What I'm saying is I learned about decolonizing from an indigenous person, indigenous from the United States or whatever it is, this place is supposed to be called, and it was a –

Ira Armstrong: Turtle Island.

Yolanda Williams: Turtle – Island. And I learned about it from the space of the mental conditioning and the colonized mind versus the decolonized mind. That's how I learned about it and that's why this podcast is named as such, especially for black people, who are living on stolen land and who were of – you know, the sins of stolen people. For us, our decolonizing might look completely different than, you know, an indigenous person of this country decolonizing. I fully agree with land back, we will just fill it out there. What I am saying is for us, it's about how the enslavement and colonization of kidnapped Africans has passed through our genes, generation, generation, generation and it has had some major conditioning on our minds and our mindset, how we view ourselves, our community, our children and –

Ira Armstrong: Yeah and our own bodies.

Yolanda Williams: And our bodies and how we view work, how we view rest. When you start really peeling apart the item, oh my gosh! You are just like, oh my gosh.

Ira Armstrong: It's a lot, right.

Yolanda Williams: That is a lot of work to do.

Ira Armstrong: Yeah, you know, I grew up in Tongva Land in Southern California in Los Angeles. And I didn't grow up knowing that word, there are some like, there's a little bit of language, but mostly – most of the Tongva people were kidnapped from their land and put in missionary schools and a lot of them were murdered and their language was murdered. And I – you know, I grew up as a black child of revolutionaries and I was not part of that indigenous movement, right. Like there wasn't that I knew of, right, when we were part of farm workers' movements and other things, I didn't eat a grape for years when I was a kid because we were boycotting, you know. But when I moved to the Bay Area, you know, you and I were talking about achievement and I moved to the Bay Area because I was invited to go to UC Berkeley, and everyone was very proud and I felt like this was a thing, right. And so when I'm talking about like the way that I was parented and the things that I've done in my life, like, that achievement, that idea of black excellence was definitely a part of that growth arc and so I didn't understand that I was being invited to help further the colonization project, by going to the University of California, which has a long history of colonization as the university system in the United States has. They generally steal land from indigenous folks of Turtle Island and then use black and brown labor to build the college and then educate mostly white children to run the world, right. That's sort of the history of that and then you can be invited into that project as long as you will continue those things. And so I didn't understand that – what it was, but I did have sort of like a pride and also a discomfort and then I started learning about the Ohlone people, you know, where I am in Berkeley, California is Ohlone Land and it's unseeded Ohlone territory. And I started learning about Strawberry Creek and the above grounding of Strawberry Creek and that's where I started it in like these very tiny ways and it wasn't until I joined the frontlines of the movement for black lives, sort of early in the movement, I joined in 2014 in the Bay Area and in 2015, we were invited by the regional councils here, the Black Lives Matter movement. We wrote love letters to each other and we're invited to stay in this land, and it's been a really, really powerful thing to have a place that I call "home", that I was invited in to by people who this has been their home for thousands – upon thousands of years. It's really, really powerful, but it has also been really, really painful to see all of the ways that I have participated in colonization to start to like what I call picking concrete out of my brain.

Yolanda Williams: I think we all have and it's because again of that conditioning, right.

Ira Armstrong: Yeah, and well, it's also – like my people left the South partially because, you know, I don't know for sure, but my grandmother claims Choctaw history and the stories that they told was that there was a point at which you had to choose, whether you are black or Choctaw and if you decided to be black, you were sharecropped and if you decided to be Choctaw, you were set on the trail of tears. Now, that happened over many, many years, but that is the story of my family of being kidnapped and murdered and displaced and then told that if your civilized enough and by civilized, they meant enslaving black Africans, right, that they were indigenous Choctaw people, the five tribes, who were willing to enslave black Africans in order to gain white acceptance and keep their land, and then they were – then that land was still stolen from them and they were set on the trail of tears. So like that kind of, like, that really complicated legacy of like –

Yolanda Williams: It's so complicated.

Ira Armstrong: Being a colonizer and being colonized and how do you heal from that and I feel like one of the gifts of being in this land is that I get to learn from the Ohlone, who said "no, thank you", and who again and again and again, and especially over the last 30 or 40 years, but always again and again and again have said, "no, thank you", I am going to do what I do, I am going to do what my people do. And they don't enslave other people in order to get that done, right, and to learn from people who refuse to enslave themselves or other people, is really powerful.

Yolanda Williams: As someone listening to this, I'm wondering what tips you might have for someone who is like, okay, I want to start this decolonizing process, like actively decolonizing my brain, my history, the land I am on, how do I get started? What advice would you have for that person?

Ira Armstrong: Well, you know, I think about this a lot and I think that often my advice is very complicated and so I'm really trying to like, what would I do? I think I am really turning to that.

Yolanda Williams: Now, where would you get started? Like, where would you start?

Ira Armstrong: Where would I start?

Yolanda Williams: Yeah, let's go there.

Ira Armstrong: I think that there are three things, right, my organization Peace Out Loud. We talk about three things, and one is to identify where you are and who you are and whether you were invited or stolen or stole other people to get to where you are, and just name it. Not because you have to go out and make reparations for the rest of your life, not because you have

to do any path, but just the first thing I think is just to say, like, "I'm here," you know, where I am in California, I'm on unseeded Ohlone, (indiscernible) (00:33:01) Ohlone land and I was invited to be here by colonizers who came and stole this land from Ohlone people. And so from there, I sort of know my own positionality.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah.

Ira Armstrong: And then I want to know who am I from, right? Where did I come from, and then I want to know who am I following now. All of us are following something. We are either following unconscious conditioning or we are following conscious conditioning. Right? And so knowing where I am, I have to follow people who have wisdom, that I believe in and agree with, and so if I'm following mostly billionaires online, and trying to be a billionaire or if I am sort of, right, like, that doesn't mean I will get to be a billionaire, right. But it means that that's going to be my mindset, that's going to be my orientation, right, and I think about like, you know, I follow modern Harriet, I follow Assata Shakur, I follow the Black Panthers, I follow the Zapatistas, I follow the Ohlone, I follow people who seek freedom for themselves and other people and who when they are wrong, learn how to correct it. Whatever that means, in that moment, right, and so those are the things that I would identify, where you are at, identify who you are and identify who you follow. And once you do those things, you can start to decide who you follow, you know, you can't decide necessarily who you are, right at this moment, you can't decide necessarily how you got here, right? Like a lot of white folks in the United States did not like personally colonize around them, right? They were born into colonization just like you and I were. But it's a question about like what they do now, right, and because I was raised by white abolitionists as well as black revolutionaries, I know that you can be proud of your white abolitionist history, you can be proud of your people and the ways that they resisted, but it's really hard to do that unless you shift how you relate to your own rightness.

Yolanda Williams: And you know, just adding onto that real quick, I've said this a few times, but colonization harms everyone! Everyone it touches, including white people. A lot of white people had to – their ancestors had to make a choice, right? Keep your culture or be white. And we know for a fact that a lot of people were just like, I am just being white. And that means so many people do not know their own culture because white is not a culture, it doesn't have a culture. You can act me if you want to, white doesn't have a problem.

Ira Armstrong: I mean.

Yolanda Williams: Unless we talk about violence.

Ira Armstrong: White culture is urgency, violence, (indiscernible) (00:35:54) no matter the cost.

Yolanda Williams: It is sometimes binary.

Ira Armstrong: Right.

Yolanda Williams: Binary thinking like

Ira Armstrong: Binary thinking.

Yolanda Williams: That's, you know, that's white supremacy culture, but –

Ira Armstrong: (indiscernible) (00:36:02) at any cost.

Yolanda Williams: But as a – yeah, as a white person, like, you know, there's not – there's not a like shared culture that is exclusive so I could – I remember, I asked somebody that and someone said like, like hamburgers, and I was like but that's American culture. I am American. So I can partake in burgers, right. So, you know, there ain't no culture. So that said, just like how I went and I got my DNA testing, because I wanted to know about myself, will encourage everyone to do that, because then you can say that –

Ira Armstrong: No, I am not doing that.

Yolanda Williams: I know.

Ira Armstrong: Do you know why though? You know that why.

Yolanda Williams: But let me finish the sentence.

Ira Armstrong: Oh, I am sorry I interrupted you. I apologize.

Yolanda Williams: It's okay. I want to advise that, listen, you all do whatever you want to do, but I for specifically the white folks listening to this, this is that same call home that I feel, that is for me to understand myself better and who I am from, in the cooking practices, to death, of rituals, like all that stuff I really want to know, because it's going to make me feel more complete and like I have an inner knowing of myself. Right now, I feel like I'm in like a limbo sometimes being black and being American and not having like roots like really deep, deep roots and that's what I am logging for, it's those roots, right. So as white people, that has been stolen from you by your ancestors. You didn't choose that, but now you have a choice. Now, you can say, well, I want to know because you'll find out that that individuality, that you all word, you know, that all hold so dear is not a natural thing and there is not a lot of –

Ira Armstrong: Well, it's also not real.

Yolanda Williams: It's not real.

Ira Armstrong: Right? Individuality is upheld because we have a brutal police force.

Yolanda Williams: Exactly. In capitalism and (indiscernible) (00:37:54).

Ira Armstrong: Right and like you can do anything – as a white person, you can go anywhere you want to because you know that the police will support you.

Yolanda Williams: Right. And just you know and when you think about, when you start looking into your ancestral heritage, you'll see that a lot of these communities, even in Europe were collective communities, where people who have villages, people who help each other, bartered, all the stuff. It wasn't individual for whatever a really long time, and so yeah, that's my one encouragement. And then for black folks or BIPOC folks, who don't know because I know some – I know an Asian man posted and it was like "my Asian have Asian kids, don't know any Asian people" and it's because I want them to be American first. And I am looking at these kids and I am like, "but they, okay". So you know these kids don't stand a chance with parents like that because they are going to have to learn about their Asianness, right, from either books or media and it might not be portrayed in a way that it should. So if you are someone that doesn't know your heritage, go out and find it. Figure it out so you can have a more complete look at who you are and embrace all those parts of you, like I said before, the light and dark. Some things you may not want to find and I feel like for white people, that's the biggest thing, you all don't want to know for a reason. You all don't want to know a reason because someone on Tik-Tok was just like have the white people ever asked their grandparents or relatives about their part in like Jim Crow and that kind of era, because they are still alive, you know. Someone said also on Tik-Tok that millennials are the first generation after the Civil Rights Act, right. So we are the first generation, I am elder millennial, as –

Ira Armstrong: I am an ex-gen.

Yolanda Williams: Okay. And so there was still civil rights issues going on during the gen-ex era, I mean there is still some going on now, but you know what I mean. So, it's not what we are talking about.

Ira Armstrong: Well, until 1993, marital rape was legal in the United States.

Yolanda Williams: Listen.

Ira Armstrong: Well said.

Yolanda Williams: So –

Ira Armstrong: Let me just let people know it's not anymore, in case that are wondering.

Yolanda Williams: But it's like there is this idea that it's so far so long ago. No. Ask your grandparents about your parents, ask for their participation, if they – especially, if they lived in the South. But even if they lived in the North. Their participation during like reconstruction in the Jim Crow era and like the civil rights, get those stories.

Ira Armstrong: Yes.

Yolanda Williams: And I think the reason why people don't want to do that is because they might feel shame, like oh my – my parents, like, or my grandparents, have they participated in lynchings? They participated in, like, they didn't do anything, they just sat down, like they were just complicit? Yeah.

Ira Armstrong: Yeah. More and that –

Yolanda Williams: That's part of your history.

Ira Armstrong: It's also part of the history of colonization, right?

Yolanda Williams: Yeah.

Ira Armstrong: I have been studying Timbuktu and I have been studying – when I came upon this one piece that they talked about like the way that Alexander "burned" the literature was not just burning it, but actually stealing a lot of it and having Greek scribes put it into Greek and under the name of Greek authors. Right? And so that history of like covering up history, and claiming the knowledge as your own, it's deep in a lot of places as like, you know, the winner gets to write history literally.

Yolanda Williams: Yes, literally.

Ira Armstrong: And so part of what we're doing and part of what we need examples of and part of why I follow the Ohlone is to shift from the narrative of conqueror. But what if it was about like living together, like what does that actually look like.

Yolanda Williams: What does it look like?

Ira Armstrong: Right? And then more grieving the places where you have justified the destruction of other people by your own survival. Right? People justify –

Yolanda Williams: Oh yes.

Ira Armstrong: So many things, right?

Yolanda Williams: As a fellow light skin, we justify a lot to talking about – when we start talking about colorism, and then light skin tears start flowing, I am just like, if you all, listen, we – we have no – everyone, stop being that way, okay. But that is colonization, that is anti-blackness. We have to understand the root of these things. Otherwise, we keep perpetuating harm and at the core of all that I do, from this point forward, is harm reduction. I really, really want to look at the things that I do with my child, with the world outside of me, the way I speak about myself and how I approach the problems of this world from that lens of harm reduction.

Ira Armstrong: Yeah, that's beautiful.

Yolanda Williams: And I think there – starting there is to me the easiest thing to do. Because like there's no shame when you go from a harm reductionist like sort of viewpoint. Very hard to feel ashamed of yourself because you are just looking at like, okay, oh I did this, that's harmful, okay, let me it back and redo that. And, because I – you know, me saying ask your grandparents, it's not so you can feel shame, it's so you can confront those dark parts of your history and be like, okay, where do I need to do, where are the changes I need to make, from this point forward, so this should stop with me, just like how black parents are now saying like this stops with me. Black folks, we don't need to parent this way anymore, we don't have to have vestiges of slavery in our homes. I mean for white people to do the same thing.

Ira Armstrong: Definitely. One hundred percent. I think that that's sort of the fourth thing that I would say, right, like you were talking about the lens of harm reduction, right, whatever lens we use, it's like who you follow, right, also? But when we talk about like knowing where you are, knowing who you are, knowing who you follow I think the fourth thing would be to create a community of practice.

Yolanda Williams: Yes. I love that.

Ira Armstrong: Right, like who are you doing this work with, and do it with people who want to be doing that work with you and who are going to be gentle with you, but also not take (indiscernible) (00:44:11). Right, like that you really want –

Yolanda Williams: Yeah, keep you accountable.

Ira Armstrong: People who are really sort of rigorous in this work in a way that is kind also. Right? Who you practice it with is so important and that's part of why I so appreciate you and the community that you're building with the Conscious Parenting groups and the Parenting Decolonized because you really, again and again and again come back to the principles that we share about harm reduction and about conclusivity and about clear boundaries, right, like all of those things (indiscernible) (00:44:462).

Yolanda Williams: Because Ira is a part of our – the Conscious Parenting for Social Justice group, it is a paid membership, but it is a –

Ira Armstrong: I am.

Yolanda Williams: Very, very safe space, and what we are real – about these things and we talk through them and help each other be present as we are, like I said, resisting and existing in these systems of oppression. So I am going to leave that (indiscernible) (00:45:11) in the show notes because I hope you all join. We have a new community off of Facebook because I like to sensor, okay, I have just got a jail, meta jail, they like to sensor folks, so we found a whole new community to, like, host this, but I hope you will all join. And with that said, I just kind of want to start wrapping this up and just for you Ira, I want to point some folks to your work, where can people find you?

Ira Armstrong: We are at PeaceOutLoud.org and we are on Facebook, that's PeaceOutLoud and on Instagram as PeaceOutLoud, and we are launching an antiracist consent-based sexual health curriculum for families and schools and that will be on our social media presence.

Yolanda Williams: I love it.

Ira Armstrong: And I am launching inspired by the Parenting Decolonized group our little personal book club, like, we do a book club in there, but I want my own book club, it's going to be open style, but open – the revolutionary – if open was a revolutionary, that's what I wanted to be. So it's going to be IraX Book Club, and I'll share that info with you.

Yolanda Williams: Yes.

Ira Armstrong: As well.

Yolanda Williams: Listen. Sometimes –

Ira Armstrong: But I want everybody to get to read what I'm reading, right.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah.

Ira Armstrong: And get to follow the people that I follow.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah.

Ira Armstrong: People are like, how did you get here? I am like, "uh".

Yolanda Williams: And share that knowledge. And then be able to pass it along and say this is what I learned and this is who I learned it from and this is what I have got from it.

Ira Armstrong: Exactly.

Yolanda Williams: And you know, sharing these resources is a part of the resistance and it is revolutionary, a lot of people like to keep things to their chest, and you know and –

Ira Armstrong: Oh, and you know I'm going to be doing it with Antoinette Scully from Black & Bookish.

Yolanda Williams: Oh okay, yeah. I love it.

Ira Armstrong: So you should have her on sometime, she is amazing.

Yolanda Williams: Okay.

Ira Armstrong: Alright.

Yolanda Williams: Antoinette, I am writing that down.

Ira Armstrong: (indiscernible) (00:47:01)

Yolanda Williams: Well, thank you so much for joining me in this conversation.

Ira Armstrong: Thank you Yolanda for all you do. Thanks for having me here today, I appreciate you.

Yolanda Williams: Thank you. And also what's so funny is this is not what we were going to talk about you all. This is just organic, like do you like – they were like push record, and I am

like, "okay", and this is like what came of that and I love it because I really – I love when conversations are organic and they flow and you learn from them, like I hope that you all listened to this and really took that this whole decolonizing thing is a journey –

Ira Armstrong: Yeah, we need the intentional and the organic.

Yolanda Williams: Yeah. Yes. And it's an ever changing, always happening type of thing, you know. It is not always easy, but it is always worth it and with that said, what does Decolonizing Parenting mean to you?

Ira Armstrong: Decolonizing Parenting to me means that when I'm wrong, I want to have a relationship with my children where they felt safe to come to me and tell me.

Yolanda Williams: I love the simplicity of that. Yeah, I love that.

Ira Armstrong: Yeah, that's it. I want to be friends with them my whole life.

Yolanda Williams: Yes.

Ira Armstrong: Want to know them, they are amazing people.

Yolanda Williams: That is my parenting vibe, is to be friends with Gia when she's an adult. I want her to like want to hang around me and want to talk to me, you know, and not have a feel like a chore so.

Ira Armstrong: That will be nice, right? Beautiful.

Yolanda Williams: That would be nice, that's the goal. Well, thank you again. And thank you all for listening. Please make sure you leave a writing and review. Let us know what you feel.

Ira Armstrong: Take care you all.

Yolanda Williams: Let us know how you feel about this episode on social media and until then, keep it conscious, bye-bye!