

CRISJ Building Justice Podcast

Season 3, Episode 13 : Social Justice Through the Lens of Kachiside Madu

Moderator: Jonathan Wong, Evalina Carrillo, Angelo Hinojosa

Guest: Kachiside Madu

Please note: This transcript may be imperfect. Please contact Professor Eliza Gregory at Sac State directly should you have questions.

Music lyrics:

Company under construction, the function, justice for the human family we demand it. Justice, true freedom, equality is a must. Thus, decolonization of the planet. So bust this. People be the power now we're Building Justice. Pulling out divinations, now we're Building Justice. Welcome the planet to the Podcast, "Building Justice," "Building Justice," "Building Justice." Building is to add on, or to do away with.

Jonathan Wong 0:31 Welcome to Building justice, a podcast by Sacramento State's Center on race, immigration and social justice. We explore the critical issues affecting our communities with the hopes of creating a healthier and more just world.

Evalina Carrillo 0:43 Hi, I'm Elena Korea and I am co hosting this episode of building justice alongside Jonathan Wong. And Angelo Hinojosa. My peers and I are seniors in the photography program here at Sacramento State.

Angelo Hinojosa 0:54 Today we are joined with Kochi city Madhu a freelancing photographer born raised and based here in Sacramento, Kochi City is the photographic activist of the people stressing the battle for social justice, taking photographs designed to store retail provoking deep thoughts while also bringing attention to inequalities in racial discrimination that particular demographics have historically faced just to name a few of his career accolades while working alongside different organizations. He has fundraised over \$12,000 In an effort to build two educational buildings in Ghana. He has also helped in distributing over 2500 items to the unhoused community in Sacramento, and has worked featured in the Crocker Art Museum here in downtown Sacramento.

Jonathan Wong 1:34

Thank you for joining us today. kind of wanted to start off by just introducing yourself a little bit.

Kachiside Madu 1:39

Sure thing. First and foremost, thank you guys for having me. I'm excited to be here. My name is could cheese today, my do local photographer from Sacramento, California born and raised from the valley, high area of Sacramento, a few guys are all familiar with that area. Growing up just wanted to be able to change the world one day at a time. So not knowing exactly how to do that initially, but then through experiences in life to going to college and meeting people along my life, I've been able to kind of hone in on my purpose and how to go ahead and live that every day.

Jonathan Wong 2:11

So kind of just to give our listeners a little background. Because she said he is a school guidance counselor and for the Oak Grove School District. He graduated from San Jose State from 2011 with a BA in psychology, and University of San Francisco with the Masters in school counseling. So photography and counseling from the outside perspective seem to be very different fields of work, but um, I kind of could see how you could use both of them to kind of complement one another. Can you kind of speak on how you use like the idea of like visual storytelling, like kind of just your process of what pushed you to take on both psychology and photography?

Kachiside Madu 2:53

Yeah, most definitely. So, I mean, I got my bachelor's in psychology, I had no idea that I was gonna go down the photography route wasn't until I got into San Francisco. And I picked up a camera for the first time. And we all know that, you know, psychology is human behavior, right? Psychology is being utilized every day, from when we're kids to adults until we get old. So being able to use psychology use the theories that I've learned in grad school, and apply them to interaction with people on the streets, to be able to ask them the right questions, to provoke emotions, and then be able to meet them on a humanity level is where I feel like the psychology lens can cross over with photography. And I think I use that quite often when it comes to mine, my portraits, being able to have strong dialogue with folks who are considered strangers, has been very powerful, and not only my walk of life, but it has opened my eyes up to just the possibilities of humanity, and understanding that we are all more alike than we are different. So I think psychology gave me the foundation of one has to be more of a human, and being mindful of different things that we all experience that can shape who we are as individuals, and then being able to use a camera to bring that to life and to store retail, and to be able to get a portrait but then also have a deeper understanding of what is going on within his portrait has been a really key.

Evalina Carrillo 4:14

So with that, we want to know more of like what your processes for seeking inspiration for like the work that you do, because like with psychology and human behavior that has a lot to do with photography now that like you're talking about it. And what have you, like, used that to hone in on the topics that you've chosen, like for the homeless to heartful exhibition and the talk of solidarity?

Kachiside Madu 4:37

Yeah, so I think when I first picked up my camera, I had no idea what I was doing. Right? I think we all kind of can relate to that right as creatives and just kind of getting your feet wet, and I don't exactly like where you're gonna go. And later on when we go to the class, I kind of talk to you about my timeline and how I got to where I'm at right now. But, you know, just from my experience with photography, I really was that integrate, especially when it comes to black and white portraits or street photography, with Gordon Gordon of sparks, I'm sorry, Gordon Park Jamal Shabazz, obviously. Spike Lee, Ave, Renee, these are all folks who I have modeled my photography around. Because I've learned that there's so much power of storytelling and oftentimes in America, right, they're not accurate, accurately, depicting certain populations, certain communities. So rather than allowing the falsified perceptions of certain communities and folks be continued on, I want to go ahead and debunk that. So I guess my processes around my photography is around humanity, and around social justice, you know, I have to call myself a photographic photographic activist, because I like to create imagery and pictures of things that people don't want to talk about. Don't wait for us to grow with individuals is to have uncomfortable conversations. And I like to use my my camera, and the pictures that I'm taking to go ahead and provoke those uncomfortable conversations. So when it comes to solidarity, Saturday comes to homelessness to heartful. Those were all inspired by just the reality of where we're currently at in our country in Sacramento, right? There's a huge homelessness population within Sacramento within California, that a lot of people want to ignore, and want to kind of skip over and sweep under the rug. And here, I am just trying to make sure that it's not being swept under the rug, I think we all have the we all have the good hearts to go ahead and contribute when we can. And I noticed that a lot of folks who want to give back to the community, but they don't have the platform or the capacity due to their day to day responsibilities to contribute. So I want to go ahead and make things easier for people. I'm not married, I don't have any kids. So my responsibilities aren't as I'm gonna say, as serious because I do have serious commitments. But I'm not a parent, right. And those are all different things that, you know, I can't relate to, but I know that if I can come to your house and pick up a bag for you, or if I can meet you somewhere that's more convenient for yourself to want to contribute, then it eliminates eliminates the, I guess, the trepidation, but eliminates kind of like that, that hurdle for things to get done. So yeah. So those are the people who are kind of inspiring me who have inspired me to continue this work. And like I said before, just social justice, making sure that everyone is being seen and being treated equally is important to me.

Angelo Hinojosa 7:26

You mentioned the Gordon Parks Foundation. I'm curious, do you know of David Allen?

Kachiside Madu 7:30

Yes, yes. My man from Baltimore. Yeah. He's doing big things. I don't know him personally. But I follow him from afar. And I know that he's doing a lot of great work. He's actually one of the people who actually actually look up to as well when it comes to the black and white photography and being able to use a camera to document a story tell the realities of the world. Right.

Angelo Hinojosa 7:52 His work is amazing. I found him around the time of the riots. The last ride sunrise. Yeah.

Kachiside Madu 7:58 What because he had the one in Baltimore, Freddie Gray. Now he had that iconic shot that when I'm talking magazines,

Angelo Hinojosa 8:04 and what the guy was in the foreground, and

Kachiside Madu 8:08

he was running. Yeah, so that was the one that went on Time Magazine. And, like, I mean, he was talented already before, you know, before that picture, but I think that's when everyone was able to see his eye and see the greatness behind his photography. And look at him now. Right? He's doing things with Steph Curry Under Armour. Yeah. He's having his own gallery. He's, he's a well well known name. And I'm looking forward to hopefully one day meeting them and being able to share the stories.

Angelo Hinojosa 8:32 Of course, did you watch the weapon of choice documentary, The Gordon Parks one,

Kachiside Madu 8:37 I have some HBO Max. I don't have HBO Max. Ah, I gotta make sure I get this as close as I can go.

Angelo 8:42

Here we go. I definitely recommend it's about Gordon Parks in a debit balance in the two. Okay, super good. So next question. How do you handle viewers who don't have the same political stances you

Kachiside Madu 8:55

have? Um, I mean, it may sound a little rude, I just turned them out. You know, I understand that my work is not for everybody. And so people don't want to have those conversations because they're not ready to, or because they don't want to challenge it. Right? Or they may be stuck in their ways. I'm not here to convince you or to persuade you to look differently. I'm just here to put art out there. That will hopefully get you to be curious on asking, you know, clarifying questions or, you know, really looking in the mirror and figuring out are you an ally, are you you know, an enemy. Alright, so, my art is intended to, you know, create chaos. It's intended to make people wake up and to see the harsh realities of the world. And if you want to get down with it, more power to you, but if you're not on that same wavelength, then no love lost, right? Maybe we'll come around at some point in time, but yeah, just kind of tune it out.

Angelo 9:45

When you're out in the field. Is there anything that makes you uncomfortable?

Kachiside Madu 9:49

Uncomfortable, I will say this when I was doing the protests, rallies and during, you know, obviously, the social justice movement Insane Things are going on with police brutality, excuse me. I think I was kind of torn in between because obviously, as a black man, and things are going on in America, I'm hurting. Inside, I'm furious. I'm upset, I'm angry. But at the same time, I have my lens. And I'm out there documenting things. And I was kind of, kind of caught in between of when do I turn that hat off of being a photographer and being an activist, right? And then when do I toggle the hat of like, okay, let me chill. Let me just refocus on photography. And I think that was a moment where I felt uncomfortable, or there's some discomfort, just for the fact that I wanted to do both equally. And I couldn't, because I'm taking pictures of cops, and I can't see here and beyond the cops face, because then I run the risk of them taking my cameras or, you know, Mason, me or whoever it may be. By the same time, I'm seeing my brothers and my sisters out there going hard. And I want to make sure that they know that I'm not just out here for the likes, or for the Instagram, you know, likes or whatever it may be. I'm actually in the trenches with him. Right. So being able to kind of find that, that balance was something that brought his comfort, but I think the more that I got, you know, onto the streets, I was able to kind of, you know, figure out my way of making that happen.

Angelo 11:14

I'm curious about how you deal with, say, like, your social media, like, I'm around people out there. And then eventually I get tired. And just want to like, take a couple of days off. Yeah. Do you ever get that? Like? How do you deal with that had to get through that?

Kachiside Madu 11:27

I definitely do. I think anything in life, when you're doing so much of it, you run the risk of having a burnout. So they say self care is really important, right? Knowing when to turn the switch off. And it's something that I've been having a little bit more of a challenge with now that I've gone full time with this, but I'm not a social butterfly. And people always say yes, you are because you can have conversation with anybody. And although I can. I'm very introverted, to be honest, like, I'm an introvert. And I recently came across this new word called an ambivert, which is basically your introverted at heart. But then when you're around people who make you feel safe and feel comfortable, you can be a little more extroverted. So they call it ambivert. So I felt like, well, my passion of photography, and being in the streets and being able to document people's faces and document you know, the realities of the world. I do at times, get a little tired of having those deep conversations, especially when that's on heavy topics, because it's really a trauma, right. So it can be very draining. But I will say that, you know, the way I look at it is life is bigger than you. So I just tap into that when I'm ever out there knowing that those kids are going to be able to see these images, and be inspired and be motivated to make a difference in

their community and in their, their generation. So that's my kind of like reminder, when am I gonna go out on the street today? Who am I doing it for? Why am I doing it right. And then when I am done doing it, I go back home, my crack me a cold one, you know, I might be able to kick my feet and watch sports, right? And just relax, right to be able to recharge that battery.

Evalina Carrillo 13:02

So going off of that, with the whole getting involved with other people and experiencing so much. I am someone who really looks at like my moments and hoses like the heart. So I wanted to ask you what are some of your most like memorable moments are like one specifically that you've kind of ran into with the homeless to heartflow exhibition or going to Ghana? With your take them home foundation or any other work that like you've done and your photographic journey with?

Kachiside Madu 13:29

Yeah, that's a that's a really tough question. But I'm glad you asked that. One of my most memorable moments, I'm trying to like dial back to there's so many that I want to kind of share out there just you know, this whole homeless homelessness to heartful exhibition, and how it came about, right, it started in 2018, where I was basically coming back home in Sacramento and I saw there's a huge population of folks who are displaced and unhappy. And seeing that there was a issue, and because they're right in my neighborhood, and prior to leaving the college, that wasn't the case. So coming back home and seeing it was definitely kind of heartbreaking to see how people were living in inhumane situations and conditions. And they're using that as a catalyst to kind of spark you know, the film, the film of bad challenge, or solidary Saturdays. And I think the most memorable moment of this whole journey is a fact that's coming full circle in the sense of in a sad because some of the same people that I'm seeing that I saw in 2018 are still out there and 2023 so that's not enjoyable. But I think just the the whole notion of staying added being consistent, and being able to understand that life is better than you and think that you are doing or making an impact. So to be able to not only serve the folks who are displaced, but that's also had them incorporate within my exhibit and have them there to showcase their their talents and their arts and for them to make money make sales. I think that was really memorable for myself because I'm big on community. I'm big on giving people the platform and you know the the shine that they rightfully deserve, and the folks who were serving every second Saturday for them to feel comfortable to show me their art. And for me to go ahead and leverage that opportunity to be a part of the exhibit was really special. So I think that was probably my most memorable moments is having the exhibit having like people come out to show love. And to raise a good amount we raised, we raised a good amount that day on Friday, to go ahead to funnel back into the community. So I think those are all bad experiences, one of my most memorable amongst others, but that one for sure. Right at the top of them.

Jonathan Wong 15:29

So you consider yourself an activist? What does it mean to you as an activist and an artist to use your platform to allow voices and the stories to not just be seen, but also be heard,

Kachiside Madu 15:41

as everything, you know, there's different type of winners out there. There's folks who are visual folks who auditory kinesthetic, right? There's folks out there who want to showcase their

activism, but that may not be the ones who want to get in front of a large audience and, you know, hold a march or whatever may be, some of them want to use their creativity, to go ahead and depict the harsh realities of that they're facing or that the community is facing. So to be able to use photography as a medium, and as the vessel that God has given me, is very special, because I understand that there are other kids, other folks who are inspired by my work, who may see that my black and white portraits or my community work with whether it be back home with the kids in Ghana, or you know, the folks who are displaced, there is a way to kind of connect the two, right, I think being able to use that platform and use a medium of photography has opened my eyes up in so many different ways on impact that I'm having. I not only myself, but the folks who are, are following. And the folks who may not say anything, but you know, deeply can't connect to my art. Right? So I love the fact that photography and you know, being an activist and kind of blending together

Evalina Carrillo 16:48

with black and white photography, there's a lot of like, impact that comes with that. But what kind of impact does it make on the story that you're trying to tell compared to like, if you're using color?

Kachiside Madu 16:59

Yeah. You know, I get that question. asked quite often, right. And, I mean, for me, I think Black and White does lease ambiguity, right? You know, colors lead to emotions. So oftentimes, I don't like folks going into my pictures or seeing my artwork with you know, alright, preconceived notion of what it could be or what their what it's saying to them based off the colors, right? Well, black and white, especially my portraits, I like to make sure that you can see all the wrinkles in the skin, you can see the scar marks there, you can see the blemishes, you can ski you can see everything on that face, because it allows you to really focus and to see exactly like, what am I seeing, right? What are the scars mean? Right? What does you know, the Cricut I mean, right. So just being able to go into black and whites, for me just has a lot more impact and allows your mind to kind of wander and it kind of engages more and more conversation with you know, folks who are actually observing the art. So black and white, my niche, I will, you know, Dibble and dabble with the color. But definitely black and whites, when it comes to portraitures allow you to kind of see the face for what it really is, and allows you to kind of have, you know, more in depth conversation with people who are actually observing it as well. Yeah,

Angelo 18:10

I agree with that. Yeah, for sure. I think black and white definitely your your skill to make a good composition is like so much more needed. Because you could have a pretty picture with pretty colors. And you don't need to have a good composition being Fischer black and whites very moving.

Jonathan Wong 18:28

So yeah, I would actually love to talk more about the homeless to heartful exhibition. Just for a little bit of context. It's the purpose of this is to bring awareness to the alarming strike of homelessness within the Sacramento region, educate folks on the matter while also providing a reminder on the powerful effects of kindness and humanity. So we are seniors in a photography court, we are taking a class currently about like the relationship of land. What is obviously you

grew up in Sacramento, what is kind of, can you talk more about like your relationship to this area? And like how that can influence you to kind of tell more stories within this region.

Kachiside Madu 19:04

Yeah, so I love Sacramento, you know, obviously, being born and raised here. I take a lot of pride of being from Sacramento. If you were to ask them, my soccer team was back in college about like how much I will just talk about the kings and Sacramento being an x ray city. That always gives me a lot of like Slack about it, right. So I'm very proud to be from Sacramento. I think it's a beautiful, beautiful city. And a beautiful state. Right. So coming back home after 10 years of being in college, and then seeing that there was a huge spike in homelessness, every bookmark, right and this is like literally around the corner from like my childhood, elementary and middle school. So I see a lot of kids are walking down that down that street. So I want to make sure that one, the folks who are experiencing homelessness are able to kind of be seen as individuals because there is a huge stigma associated to homelessness, and it can be quite ignorant. Right. I think it's really important for us to have these conversations with people who are oftentimes being over Looking overshadowed to be able to get that perspective on what may have happened to lead to homelessness, right? Because if you ask a lot of folks who were on the street, homelessness, it was not by choice, right? They were either victims of, you know, rent control, victims of being timed out at the government assistance. A lot of folks who I've spoken to are either veterans, or, you know, foster youth or former foster youth, right. So when you really get to talk to these folks and the individuals, and we get to know them on a more human level, you start realizing that they were just given a really difficult, you know, set of hands of cards, right. So for myself, when it comes to being from Sacramento, seeing the huge spike in homelessness, and being able to use my camera to go ahead and rightfully depict what's going on and allow them the platform and the space to share their truth and their stories. I think there's so much value in that, because, like I said, before, they're oftentimes being overlooked. And then given the equal time of the day that we all are right, when it comes to being asked questions about like, you know, how your day was going, or things of that nature, they're not being asked that on a daily basis, right. So for myself, I found that as an area where I'm wanting to go ahead and clean things up. And I'm just like one person, but we have a great team who comes out every second Saturday, folks who are supporting me on Instagram on social media platforms, or who are donating who are contributing to the cause it goes a long ways to clean things up. Right. And for everyone who's from Sacramento, I think there should be a sense of pride of making sure that we're cleaning our city because it's a capital of California, right. And it's really important for us to deceased folks as individuals, and not as you know, people who are homeless, but more so as an individual who was, you know, dealt a difficult head and bringing more and more kindness, more compassion, and more love.

Angelo 21:48

I love that you mentioned your your love for Sacramento. I'm also born and raised here. And for a while, I wasn't really enjoying being here. And I was before I got into like, shoot photography. And once I was able to, you know, look at our city through like a photographic guy with a photographic I began to love it a lot more. And I'm talking to photographers from Sacramento, because there's not too many, like, I feel like that we're doing big things like you are. And it is inspirational for sure.

Kachiside Madu 22:15

Most definitely. And I think like you said, the perspective of having the lens and being excuse me, the lens and being able to, like you said, walk around the city of Sacramento, you're seeing things from different angle learning perspective, right? Because we're driving around talking about you may see things but then when you're actually on the street, and you're actually walking, even a one block radius, and you're being intentional, like I'm I spend the next 30 minutes an hour on this block, I'm not gonna go anywhere else, I'm gonna stay right here, you'll be able to see things that I may not be may not have been trained to see. So yeah, I think even walking around seeing people see the landscape seeing the architecture of our buildings. We have a lot of interesting people out here. And I say that in a good way. I think that's why there's so much power industry photography, and being able to have these conversations with people because you start realizing the different talents and the different things that we all have in common. And that can spark a whole nother conversation. Right, other people so and you realize that that was very small. segment was really small. Right? So I think that's the strength in one photography, but then also community.

Unknown Speaker 23:18 Did you eat this morning?

Unknown Speaker 23:22 Early, I know I'm not I'm not a breakfast person.

Evalina Carrillo 23:26

I'm not a breakfast person I used to not be. But then I started lifting and then I got hungry all the time. That's different.

Kachiside Madu 23:30

Because after you have to after a big workout, you got to kind of put the protein Yeah, to replenish the, you know, what's worked out. But I mean, if I don't know, I'm more of a lunch kind of person. And I just, you know, go hard at dinner too. So, according to my stomach is telling me like, it's like skipping breakfast.

Jonathan Wong 23:49

So to going back to take them home foundation. How did you how did that come to be? Like? How did you get involved? And like maybe talk about the process of like, how you guys decided on where you're gonna go? Why Ghana? And maybe kind of talk a little bit about that.

Kachiside Madu 24:05

Yeah, so I mean, before we get into that, gotta give a special shout out to both brothers who are part of this campaign. My brother Kofi Epson from Blackstar, united, and then also kind of Baker from the city eats. Me and Kofi have known each other for about 12 years. And we've always wanted to go back home to Africa and take care of our people. He's gotten a and actually, I'm Nigerian, so we felt like since we're both from Africa, and we want to kind of, you know, make the diaspora closer to Africa. So we had this kind of idea maybe like, five, six years ago about how do we go ahead and take care of the babies back home in a way in which is very empowering and we can also use our the resources and the connection that we have in America

to go home and bless the babies back home. And just the community of Africa right so this take them home campaign has been going on for the last a year and a half. And we started off with just wanting to send them back home toiletries, clothes and shoes, and non perishable items or food items so they can go Go ahead and just, you know, get the right nutrition and you know, get the right clothes so they can feel good about themselves as they go to school. And then coffee, went back home and December and was able to see the kids for the first time. And while he was there, he was seeing that we're doing great things, right, we're able to get them clothes, shoes, food, and all the all the other things in the works. But when he got there, he noticed that one, they weren't having filtered water in the village at the school site that they were at. So we went ahead and use some of the funds that we were able to raise through community, and corporations and nonprofits to go ahead and provide them with, you know, a purify water tank. And then he came back home said, Hey, guys, we gotta do something that's more impactful, right? Like, how can we go ahead and, you know, do something that's more legacy, right? Don't get us wrong, like saying home clothes and home shoes, and all that is very helpful and useful. But how do we go ahead and make some that's more of a legacy. So out there, he knows that there was an admin building that hadn't been finished in over 10 years, right. So come back home, he was like, Hey, guys, let's go ahead and you know, shift our efforts in the donations and use that towards, you know, really finishing the admin building. And if anyone is in the education, or has experienced education, right, it's really hard to teach kids and to grade. And to have a, you know, a break from the usual you're all in the same building, same classroom. Right. So, and this is not good for the overall ever overall vibe of teaching students, if you're just with them, 24/7, you're not able to kind of, you know, separate in, you know, grading papers or taking a break for yourself. So we went ahead and call upon the community to go ahead and raise more funds to, you know, finish the Admin Building, which were able to complete. So then we want to make sure that we got back home to do ribbon cutting of it, and also to do some feeds out there. So community feeds and for different communities. So we're there for a week, we went to four different communities to do feeds where we were able to feed the community with over 200 meals for every feed. And then we went to see that school and where we had a ceremony to do the ribbon cutting. And to see the kids it was so special, right? To see the kids that we actually been in communication with the last year and a half in person. And to see the effect that we were able to have on them was very special. So we're able to donate 10 laptops, we got them a lot of math books, English books, from local schools, and Elk Grove Unified School District, school supplies, just to make sure that we were able to close that achievement gap from you know, Africa and then also from the states within that population. So it was a special we're going to be doing, hopefully every year or every other year, we still haven't had our debriefing meeting to kind of you know, figure that out. But Be on the lookout for those who are listening, take them home campaign. Like I said, a follow on my brother, Kofi Epson Blackstar, United or Cayenne Baker at the city eats, you'll get more information on our continued efforts of connecting the diaspora to Africa.

Jonathan Wong 27:55

So for listeners who want to help but don't know where to start, how can they get involved,

Kachiside Madu 28:00

I would encourage them to follow me on my social media. That'd be a good way to start off and you can DM me, my social media is at make underscore it underscore Madhu and make it

Madhu. That'll be the probably the first step to kind of getting breaking the ice. Once they get in contact with me, then we can go ahead and kind of you know, inform them on what we do and how to go about raising funds. And you know, the next time we're going to be going out to Ghana or to Africa in general to to do the great work that we're doing. So I would just say yeah, see me on Instagram.

Evalina Carrillo 28:35

Thank you for listening. We hope our ongoing conversation sparked understandings, empathy and motivation to join the struggle for a better future for all. You just listened to the building justice podcast. The information contained in this podcast, including its title and description represent the views and opinions of the hosts and guests and do not necessarily represent the views or opinions of the Sacramento State C r is J Transcribed by https://otter.ai

Outro Music Lyrics

No more penalties and no more wars. Based on the actions. Now, time for "Building Justice," "Building Justice." Time for building justice, justice.