

BNPower:

BUILDING NARRATIVE POWER

A set of multimedia tools that explore why some ideas take root while others disappear.

BEYOND STORY PODCAST: Adventures in Narrative Power Show Notes & Transcript

EPISODE 2: Pop Culture: The Justice Remix

- PART I: Singer, songwriter MILCK [<https://www.milckmusic.com/>]
- PART II: Kristina Mevs-Apgar, Culture Change Director at the [National Domestic Workers Alliance](#) (start 22:19)

TRANSCRIPT PART I:

Makani Themba:

Why do some ideas take root and become prevailing wisdom while others trend a minute and seem to disappear? The reason, we're told, is that ideas that stick are more compelling and easier to grasp than the ones that don't. Umm, but that's not quite true.

[bell rings]

I'm Makani Themba. An organizer, change communication strategist, and black women trying to get free. I've learned that what distinguishes ideas that root and stay with us, good or bad, is the structural and cultural power behind them. It's not about powerful narratives. Though they help. It's about out narrative power. This power is all around us, in our heads...

[singer]

One two three four five six seven eight nine

Makani:

And hearts.

[gospel song]

Makani:

It shapes what we think is true.

[clip]

How Christopher Columbus discovered America.

The power to define what's true, to determine the story of the past and institutionalize ideas so they replicate, this is narrative power.

Makani:

What's fact. What's right. Narrative power determines the story of the past and roots and reproduces ideas over time. It's way beyond story. Join us. As we stretch our understanding of what it means to build narrative power and explore ways to transform the institutions that shape how we, all of us, make sense of the world.

Makani:

Today, we're talking about pop culture as a space for building narrative power and transformative change. I'm super psyched to talk with singer songwriter, activist, and beautiful being MILCK, whose music has inspired millions to reflection and action. Your breakthrough song, Quiet, became an anthem and rallying cry for literally millions around the globe. Please share a little about the song and what happened.

MILCK:

I wrote quiet as my own healing song in end of 2015. So it was about a year before any rumblings of the women's March was in the ether. And I wrote that song because I started going to therapy and really starting to question the narrative that I was telling myself that I had something wrong with me. And that I was the one that attracted the abuse in my life and that I didn't deserve good things because of that. And that was a very subtle narrative that controlled a lot of what I did. And there were a lot of moments where say, I'd go to workshops or talk to teachers or mentors. And they would ask me like, think big for yourself: What do you want? And I would hit this ceiling in my mind, and I knew that there was something unnatural about it because there's the part of my intuition that knew that I do deserve good things, but it was so buried underneath the narrative that I was telling myself for, I think, 15 years.

MILCK:

And once I started to learn that what happened to me was not my fault. And that there's room for me to reclaim my voice, my belonging, my myself love, a flood of healing started happening very internally and privately with myself. And then it started flowing into my songwriting and my songwriting started to address this idea of not keeping quiet. And when I wrote the chorus of the song, "I can't keep quiet a one-woman riot." I remember feeling this sense of rebelliousness that really made me feel alive and like excited because I had been told so many times if you write the word woman in a song, or if you make it gender specific, you're going to cut out part of your audience. I had learned those in like how to write a hit song workshops, you know? And I said in that moment, I don't care.

MILCK:

And it was like this micro moment of freeing myself from the structure that sits upon our society. And I felt alive. And I knew that this song was helping me heal because I remember walking out of that writing session in Los Angeles. I walked out of the studio feeling this weight lifted off my shoulders and my neck, like not being so tight. I felt like this loosening in my body. And I was like, okay, well that was a gift for myself. And for the first time in my, you know, my mid-twenties, I was letting go of this need to succeed with a song. It was just the song it had to be because I needed it to feel okay. So I ended up feeling this similar sense of rebellious newness when I watched our country elect Trump as our president at the end of 2016.

MILCK:

And I felt a very parallel sense of rebelliousness. And I was like, huh, that's interesting. And I immediately thought of Quiet is that Quiet feels like my response to what is happening on the television screen. And when I saw the women's March was forming and there was this invitation for women and people who support women to March and express their dissent in a peaceful way as like, oh, I am in. And I didn't quite understand what I was doing, but I ended up deciding that I wanted to recruit a bunch of people to sing in harmony because harmony for me has been a really healing. Harmony from me is like icing a note. I trust myself to sing my specific note and I trust someone else to sing their unique note. And then when we actively practice trust together, we create something beautiful. And as a survivor of abuse, trust is one of those things that gets broken very quickly and maybe all humans can relate to that. But I thought I'm so grateful for this march happening and people collecting. I want to serve and I want to give something. I don't want, I'm going to just march and that's enough. And also as an artist, I wanted to provide something. And so I ended up recruiting 24 or 25 other strangers. I recruited them online and I sent all of

them links like two sheet music I made and recordings of my voice and everyone learned separately. And then we gathered in DC before the March.

[singers]

'Cause no one knows me, no one ever will
If I don't say something, take that dry blue pill
They may see that monster, they may run away
But I have to do this
I can't keep quiet, no-oh-oh-oh-oh
I can't keep quiet, no-oh-oh-oh-oh

MILCK:

And when we all sang together, we didn't know each other. But then after the song was sung, we knew each other, in a deep carnal way. Tears were shed. And we ended up going to the March and there's so many people and we just, we flashmob the song like seven times. And then on the seventh time, this woman happened to walk by and I didn't know who she was at that time. But I would soon become very close with her because she filmed our performance on her cell phone and posted it to her social media accounts. Alma Harel is her name. And she's an incredible artist activist director. And over two days, the video on her accounts got like 8 million views and it started, it kept growing. And I was really surprised because I had spent most of my life like doing things rather like unnoticed in us in a certain way, like pretty low key of the lifestyle that I had.

MILCK:

And then when that, when all that attention was coming to the song, I decided to put the sheet music up and I decided to put all those recordings that has sent the original choir singers. I put on a Google drive. I posted online: Hey, if you want to learn the song too, you can. And then within like days or maybe a week, I can't fully remember, but choirs from all over the world started popping up and making their own versions, which was a whole spiritual transcendent experience for me, because the resounding message for me at that time that I needed was 'I am not alone' because I felt so isolated in my grief and trauma. And, and then watching people use this song to talk about their own stories was a sacred experience.

Singers:

(Must be someone who'll understand)
Let it out, let it out
Let it out now
There'll be someone who understands
Let it out, let it out
Let it out now

MILCK:

And I got, I got an influx of messages of people sharing their stories of their trauma, how they've survived. And I thought it was really interesting that, you know, asking people to learn sheet music, to learn the parts and to sing and to gather community. That's like, it's not that easy of a task. It's like, takes a little bit of work. And I found that very interesting because I think when people are moved, they do want to do the work to be a part of something greater. And that's what I noticed. And so sometimes when people say, oh, you got to make the community building exercises easy. Sometimes that's not true. Sometimes I think people want to go deep together.

Makani:

I love that. That's a really, I think a really important, I guess some people would say a 'noticing,' I think, that cracks me up. But this idea of people being willing to go deep, that, you know, we don't have to underestimate people or our soft ball it. That in the end people did, they really did. And like you said, globally, folks held the song close and it felt like, uh, a moment of power, like people going deep, but also powerful. And I wonder, in addition, do you have any observations about that sort of relationship between what culture can do, what a song can do and people feeling more powerful?

MILCK:

I learned a lot during that process, because I wasn't very well versed in being part of, you know, global movements that was like my first time. And I felt this, initial and very young type of self-consciousness because I thought: oh, why am I getting all this attention? We have to work on our political system. And here I am doing these news articles and interviews. I was like, what about the activists that are doing the work on the ground? And actually, our mutual friends, Marianne Manilov. She had reached out to me because of the video. And we became friends. I happened to see her email and I happened to, I just had this instinct I had to call her, and I remembered telling her, I was like, I feel this, I don't know, this self-consciousness, this guilt, that I'm getting this attention when there's so much need to work on the actual policies and change.

MILCK:

And, and she told me that movements need that emotional spark. And art has a way of really getting into the heart of a human spirit and being able to ignite this desire to be a part of something. So she said that policy change and the activist side work hand in hand with the quote unquote softer sides of, like, cultural art statements and they walk hand in hand together. And so that taught me a lot and I started reprogramming, cause I think I still had some of that, like, capitalists, like thinking that art is not as valuable, you know? And so I started to have to deconstruct that and I see it very clearly now, especially after pandemic. Seeing the role of art and how much it kept people going and brought people together and helped us communicate complex ideas about so many different movements that have swelled during this time. So I feel very certain that art and storytelling are an integral part of—it's like the fuel, I think, for the movements that we create.

Makani:

Yes, actually, I love that. And it seems like you've built deeper on those ideas with Somebody's Beloved and I saw how intentional you were around connecting with folks on the ground. So I'd love for you to talk a little bit about that process. Was it an evolution from where you started? What was it and what got you there?

MILCK:

Great question. I absolutely see the evolution from writing Quiet and not quite fully understanding what I was doing. It was less intentional, of like, I'm going to build a movement, cause I wasn't, I didn't have that language. I was just, I want to do this and if people want to join me, that'd be incredible. And then three and a half years later, Somebody's Beloved, which is a song that really burst after studying and reading up and being moved by Breonna Taylor's story and George Floyd. And then the countless other stories that unfortunately have been haunting our American U.S. history and also igniting these really powerful movements of revolution. I had to do a lot of self-reflection to see what my role was, in perpetuating the system that harms Black and my Black and Brown siblings. And I realized as an Asian American woman, my family was able to immigrate here because of Black activism and creating the immigration policy in the sixties that empowered my father and mother to move here.

MILCK:

And my parents moved here without the context of what happened in the United States' history. The main thought they had was they wanted us to survive. And so they taught us how to do what we needed to do to climb the ladders so that we could be safe. And so, I realized last year that the ladders I was climbing were ladders that were built by an oppressive system. And if I kept climbing without understanding that context, I was causing harm to my Black and Brown siblings. And so it was a big moment of, okay, I got to slow down and I gotta question why I'm climbing these ladders. Sonya Renee Taylor talks about, you know, dismantling the ladders within ourselves because that's all part of this hierarchical system. And when she said that on this Instagram live video, I was like, I, you know, social media does haunt me so much, but this moment is very important.

MILCK:

I learned, I learn a lot, you know. And I thought about that and I said, I had those ladders and I really want to look at that. And so when I wrote Somebody's Beloved, it's about my Black siblings in this world and what is happening and why aren't we all screaming? And, and then I thought, okay, I'm signed with Atlantic records. And if I release a song, there's a profit structure that goes with it. That's kind of strange because then where the resources that are going to the song going when I'm singing about this matter. I

was like, I feel like the resources need to be redirected. So then I thought, okay, maybe there's a way to create a fund. Cause I had already practiced that with Quiet. I created a fund with organizations that really lifted up feminine divine principles. I as like, oh, maybe I can do that again for Somebody's Beloved. I have a lot of learning to do because I am no longer, uh, you know, with the Women's March, I am a woman so I could speak from that place.

MILCK:

But as a person who wanted to advocate for community, that I am spiritually a part of, but I am not like, I don't represent the Black or Brown communities. I thought I need to do a lot of listening and learning. And so I teamed up with you Makani and I teamed up with Marianne Manilov, who taught me a lot. And I did a lot. I teamed up with two women from Hawaii who were really passionate about helping me. They're called benefit partners. And we just started researching all these different nonprofits. And I think for us was also a form of hope because within the pain of that time in our country, we were looking at nonprofits and grassroots organizations that were doing work on the ground. And it gave us this sense of grounding and hope and inspiration.

MILCK:

We're like, oh wow, there's so many orgs. So we have like this crazy spreadsheet of like all these orgs that we were looking at. And I remember going to you and asking you: Hey, are there orgs that you love? And you were very thoughtful in teaching me, like it spans with indigenous cultures as well. And so that was very powerful for me to learn. And eventually I just started, like, I just started having more conversations and connecting like real, taking the time to build more active community. And I ended up falling in love with seven orgs. And we created the Somebody's Beloved Fund. And I was told by some companies like, or some advisers in the music industry, you should just really pick one, so you can more easily brand yourself. So you can tell that story. And I understood that.

MILCK:

However, I was like, what if that's just a thought in this current paradigm of this hierarchical paradigm? It's like, again, that one, I was like, what if we create an ecosystem of amazing organizations and that felt more feminine divine to me, whether or not I can more easily brand myself or not. I didn't think that was important. And then, you know, with the rise of AAPI hate, I ended up bringing in three AAPI organizations. Because I realized I wasn't seeing myself and my culture within the healing of this movement. And that was a big part of this journey for me. And one of the organizations, Freedom Inc., they do Black and South Asian solidarity. And I thought that was really, really powerful and they do that in Wisconsin. And and they also do a lot of work with LGBTQ advocacy.

MILCK:

So anyways, I just was really inspired. Now that community of orgs is actually interacting with each other, which is the coolest thing, you know, that now BEAM which is Black, Emotional and Mental Health Collective is collaborating with One Family Memphis and they're exchanging information. So it's this cool thing that just is, we're just watching an awe. And now I'm at this next phase of, I just got a grant and I'm going to invest in another artist who has a vision to create more dance oriented art, to communicate solidarity and coming together and also accountability through movement. And so that's cool. It's like again, creating an ecosystem of artists who want to tell stories that then funnel those resources back to these 10 grassroots orgs.

Makani:

I love that. And you know, I'm a huge fan of all the groups this in and always have special love for Freedom, Inc. cause I've been riding with them for a long time. You know, they're awesome, all the groups, and I love this story around the developing of more connections because that's also power too. And that's also how institutionalizing culture and thinking of alternative ways of how the resources get rooted and allocated and move. So this is powerful on all kinds of levels. So thank you, so grateful for you. I'm so grateful for your work in your heart, in the world, and I'm just, you know, so grateful. Thank you.

[singers]
 Blood on leaves falling like autumn
 Her story's been told a thousand times
 Why doesn't everybody scream?
 For anyone listening
 Say her name
 Say her name

TRANSCRIPT PART II (start 22:19)

Makani:

Kristina Mevs-Apgar is the culture change director for the National Domestic Workers Alliance. One of the smartest organizations about building narrative power I know. The Alliance uses just about every platform to advance their work and ideas.

Makani:

I'm so excited to nerd out with you Kristina.

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

Of course, I love talking about this stuff.

Makani:

You know, a lot of times when people think about narrative and what's working, they always think about right-wing stuff. It was important for us to raise up the work that we're doing as organizers trying to make transformative change. And you guys are at the top of the list, so thank you for making that time. So thought it would make sense for you talk a little bit around the fact that your title itself is not a title that often, that you see in organizations, even though we do need them. So you are the Culture Change Director, right? Can you say a little bit about that? Are you the first one?

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

Yes. At MBWA. And I had a title when I first started four years ago, Creative Partnerships Director that I think people understood more, which now I realize when I say Culture Change Director, I always need to follow it up with what that means. And when I explain it to the world, I say, basically I do all sorts of things that intersect with pop culture, anything that our movement, domestic workers, domestic work, building movement, building progressive movement, anything within those spheres that enters pop culture. That's where I play. And then I list some examples, like say podcasting and arts and entertainment, and cultural organizing like murals and script integration in Hollywood and celebrity engagement, all sorts of things that seep into mainstream culture. So culture is everywhere, right? So if I say culture change, we're talking about people could think that means my local religious community. That means the bowling alley. I mean, literally culture is all around us. So we try to keep it specific over here to what we mean, where we play and we're playing in mainstream scale, bringing also niche culture into scale into mainstream, and really playing for the hearts and minds and beliefs and norms and behaviors of everybody. And we're going to meet them there.

Makani:

That's super powerful. And even though we know that works right, I mean, one of my experiences was with tobacco control. We had these, you know, monthly meetings with screenwriters in Hollywood, you know, we did all these things. Right? And so I love the fact that I'm watching you all do this and how you're holding it. I'd love for you to say, talk a little bit more about the strategy. You know, I know it's strategies, intersecting and all of that, but just a little bit more about, like—you guys are digging, you're digging in, why is this important? And what does this actually look like?

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

Yeah, I'm really a big fan. And this is because I didn't come from the movement. I came from the other side. I came from the entertainment side. And so I love speaking with examples that people can really wrap their arms around and be like, this is what this strategy looks like in practice. Like you said before,

we have a suite of strategies over here at NDWA, the National Domestic Workers Alliance, everything from grassroots organizing to policy, state, local, even on the municipal level, we do direct membership, direct services. We build economic power. We have an innovations lab that builds a portable benefits platform. We play everywhere. And as a part of our narrative power strategy, it includes strategic communications, which most people, when they hear a narrative power, they might immediately go to what is in other words called strategic comms, which includes burns media, paid media, messaging, talking points, all the things that we think about, right.

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

So that's super important. And we constantly are at the top of our game in that space, but we also mean other ways that narratives are passed along outside of traditional news media and outside advertising. So we mean symbols. So we think about design. We think about arts and culture. We think about messengers, who are the trusted messengers in various spaces, whether that be a celebrity or an influencer or an artist or a small business owner. We think about who. Who are the local artists creating local art in specific communities and what sort of pieces of art can we create in public spaces that act as a convening point for our local organizers to engage on their local organizing campaigns. We think about the emergence of new platforms and mediums. We launched a podcast called Sun Storm—giving a plug to another podcast in your podcast—hosted by Ai-jen Poo and Alicia Garza, two incredible women.

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

And I've been so lucky to work with them. And we talked about how do women build power and stay powerful in a really chaotic moment where there was a lot of sun and a lot of rain, and how do you stay powerful and live powerfully in that? And we loved that experience. So we're constantly thinking of where can we go, where people are congregating and we'll experiment with anything. We will go there, you know, right now and watching the emergence, okay, not the emergence, the emergence for me, cause I was never into games. E ven though my husband spends time gaming, but gaming, you know, there's a reason that people are more and more politicians are finding a way onto the gaming apps and trying to reach out to people there. So we'll go anywhere. And that's basically the base of our strategy is: where are the people? Where can we go to them? How can we speak to them in a way that they want to be spoken to that they'll understand? And how can we shift beliefs, thoughts, and importantly norms? How can we create a new norm?

Makani:

That's what this series is all about. You know, helping people understand narrative power is more than just a powerful story, just building power and also rooting and institutionalizing our stories so they continue to reproduce and recreate. So I love this. You know, I have to ask though, are you guys about to do some games? Is that what's up? We we're about to see some?

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

I wouldn't go that far. Consulting inside gaming, just like so many non-profits are in the entertainment world, specifically in Hollywood consulting on film and TV, which is something that we do as well. That is something that we are looking into. How do you approach gaming in the same way you approach other pieces of content like film and TV, where there's incredible creators and animators and writers, and you speak with them and you create a feedback loop between artists who are creating pieces of content, again, at scale. So many people are consuming this and how do we act as collaborators and partners. And we are connected to our base that we are accountable to, and so we act as that bridge. So more and more, I feel like non-profits, we need to look at games. We need to look in places that we might've not been before or yet, and start building those connections and building those bridges. So I'm always scanning. I feel like we always need to scan.

Makani:

Yeah, no, absolutely. And I remember, movements back in the late nineties and early part of two thousands to try to deal with representation, obviously, cause that's an issue. And even in this journey to do this work, and this, and our cartoon and the other things that are coming out as part of this project, we met actors who are in the gaming world, who are also part of this conversation, who are pushing and trying to advance for less stereotypes, more layers. And also trying to figure out how gaming can contribute to greater imagination of what's next, which I'm excited about. I'm loving meeting some of these folks. I'm hoping we'll get a chance to talk to them actually as part of this series.

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

I will love that. I will listen to that episode.

Makani:

There we go, we're going to see if we can make that happen. We're still trying to schedule that. So we put the good juju out. In speaking of figuring out how to do things differently and working with and around the film and entertainment industry, I would love if you wouldn't mind talking a little bit about this amazing, I thought amazing project in 2018 where you guys basically took over the Golden Globes, you know, had a big chunk of the Oscars in a sort of like award shows. What! I love it! I'm just curious if you could talk a little bit about the campaign, what you were hoping to do, what you think you got out of it. And of course, a little bit for folks who aren't familiar, what it was.

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

I'm assuming you're talking about Roma, right.

Makani:

Yes. It was about Roma, but it felt like it was so much, it got bigger than Roma.

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

Yeah. I asked because NDWA was also on the red carpet. Sounds crazy to be like we were on the red carpet multiple times with Time's Up. And domestic workers were very active in the #metoo movement, which was another culture shift and culture change, narrative power moment. So Roma was definitely my baby. And if a podcast also included visuals, you would see behind me, I have an incredible coaster that reminds me it's over my shoulder that I always like to look at. And it reminds me of kind of the power of story and the power of taking story and using it to create, as Ai-jen says, create the space in people's imaginations to progress further. So we have had a great relationship with Participant the production company. They are incredible people, and there's a woman Nicole Star over there who works on their social impact.

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

There are not a ton of entertainment companies that are so intentional about how social impact is built into their work. So they're from the beginning. So she gave me a call that summer, the summer before the campaign and said: Hey, we have this film. I can't tell you what it is. I can't tell you really anything about it. Other than it's Alfonso Cuarón. And there's a domestic worker in it. And I said, okay. And it was at this point, Alfonso had only shared the script. It was done filming, but before they filmed, he had only shared the script with, I believe, just with the CEO of Participant David Linde, no one else. I mean, this was his, this was his baby. This was the most personal film he'd ever written, which was a love letter to one of the women who raised him.

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

In addition to his mother Cleo. Well Cleo is the name of the protagonist in the story. His nanny who helped raise him and really was instrumental in his life was named Liebow. So that's all she could tell me. I said, yes, let's do a campaign and started rattling off tactics. I had no idea what was possible. And then a follow up call said, do you all want to come to the Venice Film Festival in Italy and see the film? Alfonso would like to personally invite Ai-jen, and one of your domestic worker leaders. And we went there and I'll never forget one of our leaders from Texas walking out of the premiere after seeing it, her face was, uh, just kinda overwhelmed. And she said, that was me. That was my story. And it was beautiful. And then also Ai-jen, her face just, you could see the moment that this was a film that an indigenous domestic worker was not only a central protagonist, but it was her story in a holistic nuanced—

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

I mean, they showed a love story. They showed, you know, a complicated friendship and, you know, everything, like, it was her, it was a whole human and it was beautiful. And so from the moment we came back, we said, we're going big. So we built a huge social impact campaign. Our partners in it were Participant. The film was distributed by Netflix. They were very supportive of our work and we were incredibly proactive. We built the campaign. We made it work for our campaigns and for our agenda and for our important short-term policy gains that we needed. So the timing was perfect. We were just about to introduce our National Domestic Worker Bill Of Rights, which was co-sponsored by now VP Harris and

Congresswoman Jayapal. And so we used the film. We had a screening in DC and we invited Congress members and created a big moment out of it.

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

We held on 19 community based screenings across the country for affiliates and chapters where domestic workers and their communities could come and watch the film. I like to say we had two campaigns in one. One was for domestic workers. And the end goal was literally to see yourself. To see yourself, to feel empowered by that, to feel moved by that, to feel challenged by that. And then to have our local grassroots chapters and affiliates use that congregation to organize, to build power. One of my organizers in New Jersey years later said, you know, we wouldn't be introducing our New Jersey bill of rights. If it wasn't for the Roma screening in Newark, New Jersey, I said, why, what are you talking about? And he said, yeah, that was the first time we all got together, all the New Jersey groups and we all worked together, and co-labored and it built trust.

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

And then we kept, we kept talking to one another and I was like, whoa, that's cool. That's like using a product for organizing directly. And then the second campaign was for audiences that were non impacted non either employers or just to build solidarity education. And we had a robust digital campaign. We had a website, we did PSA's Alfonso did a PSA for us. We had huge social media pushes and, and then our big, big, big tent post event. And also domestic workers were at every official event. If there was a Roma premiere, there were domestic workers on the red carpet. At the Netflix, at the actual premiere in LA, Alfonso actually introduced Ai-jen to give a pitch which was incredible. And our biggest thing was our Oscar party. We said, we're going to have an Oscar party.

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

It's going to be on par with all the other full Oscar parties that go on in LA. It is going to be for, by, centering domestic workers. We've called it, that the Heroine's In Our Home. And it was huge. We had A-list celebrities on our red carpet alongside our own, you know, A-list domestic workers. And we got a ton of media. We had a ton of media and we were able to—kind of, what I was looking for, was when people discuss Roma, they'd be like, oh, this was a fantastic film. And then their second beat would be commentary on domestic work and domestic workers. That was our goal. It's not just, was it a powerful film, but after you say, oh, what a great piece of art, you then continue the conversation and talk about the sector, the women in real life. We accomplished that. We really did. It was beautiful.

Makani:

Yeah, it was amazing. I mean, y'all even pulled Oprah in.

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

Well, I will say that it's incredible how far our narrative has spread, but sometimes it is in indirect ways. That was Oprah at the golden Globes. And also naming that, you know, she has ancestors that were domestic workers and that was a crazy moment. We didn't know that was coming either. We also had, it was during the governor election, where Stacey Abrams was running, Barack Obama was speaking down there, and he called out domestic workers. I mean, we've had some incredible moments where we've seen high profile individuals name our movement, name domestic workers out loud, and back to Roma, Alfonso did that during the Oscars, during his acceptance speech of best director. He made a call-out for the domestic worker movement. And that was seen by 26 million people. It's pretty big.

Oscars clip:

And the Oscar goes to Roma. [cheer]

Alphonso Cuaron:

Oh yeah, I want to thank the Academy for recognizing a film centered around an indigenous woman. One of the 70 million domestic workers in the world without work rights, a character that had been historically relegated to the background in cinema.

Makani:

Absolutely definitely a watershed moment. And I'm curious that was 2018, there was all kinds of building that, you know, to get up to that point, right. And then the work continues to try to keep it, keep the momentum going. Any lessons? And any sort of musings that you would like to share? A lot of the folks who we expect will listen to this will be organizers and folks building on the front lines on a variety of issues.

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

A couple things come to mind. So first is that there is power to it in conjunction with other strategies. I think a lot of times organizers and due to lack of capacity, which is totally understandable—so if there are funders listening, fund this work—but also because there's less theory, there's been less theory about culture change strategy. That's kind of proliferated around the movement and people maybe just don't think it's as important or as serious, but it should be included in your suite of strategies. And there are so many cultural organizers or narrative change practitioners who do the sort of work that would love to have a chat with you and see if they can brainstorm things with you. So if anyone listening, ever wants to check in, you can always reach out to me and I love to talk shop about this. But open yourself up to including this in your suite of strategies.

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

It doesn't have to be everywhere, but somewhere, some of the places, it is the best thing that you can use at that moment. And it matters. So that would be the first thing. The second thing is to take risks, be innovative, and really put your neck out there. Just because something hasn't been done before, just because it feels a little like you are really trying something completely new and you don't know if you will be successful, still try it. And third, partnerships. Partnerships are so important and actually that sort of relationship management is key. So many times in this work, it is a result of partnering with artists and creatives and institutions and production companies and aggregators of entertainment power, and having a really good partnership that is not transactional, but transformative, which is what Ai-jen says. It takes a lot of work.

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

It's the same as doing great organizing, where it involves a lot of listening, person to person, having one-on-ones and deep listening for each other. So you really need to invest in those partnerships. Roma would have never been as successful as it was if it wasn't for deep relationship management, with Participant, with Alfonso Cuarón, with the other stakeholders in their Oscar campaign. So relationships really matter and building trust with the other practitioners in this field, there are a bunch of organizations doing great work. I will always lift them up. We lift each other up and we compare notes. That is so important. And yeah, I think that those are kind of the biggest pieces of the puzzle that I would say.

Makani:

Is there anything we should be looking at on the horizon that you feel like here's a trend that folks should be paying attention to in this work? I mean, you know, you guys experiment, you guys are using bots really interestingly, I mean just all kinds of things. So I'm just curious, you know, someone who's stays on the leading edge, what do you see ahead that you're like, hmm, that intrigues me.

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

So clearly after last year. After Freedom Summer or The Uprising, everybody calls last summer, a different term where racial justice, really, the movement just reached another level due to the tragic murder of George Floyd. Companies, corporations, entertainment companies, everybody that is not in the nonprofit field is trying to do something. And we should be watching that and watching for the opportunities and also the areas where we are losing ground or could lose ground. And we need to set the agenda. And what I mean by that specifically, in terms of culture change, entertainment companies are building out their departments, their in-house departments, whether they call it multicultural marketing or multicultural audience development, or some just use diversity and inclusion. Jobs are being built and movement should advise. And what that looks like when it comes to creative content and be mindful of that and continue to have a relationship with these folks.

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

And it is a good thing that companies are trying to do better in particular, those who, who reach millions of people through their stories. But we should also be present in the room and talking as these new people are on-boarded or some organizers apply for those jobs to get in there. So I am definitely watching that for opportunities. I would also say that it moves so quickly. Social media moves so quickly. We're all well aware of the power of social media. We will not forget Cambridge Analytica or everything else that has happened. So I am always watching where people are moving. Four years ago when I started in NDWA, it didn't have a Instagram account. Now it was one of our most important platforms. So even though I am getting older, I do have a TikTok account. I do not post, but I definitely watch. I'm a lurker.

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

And we did our first TikTok activation this year for our Care Can't Wait Campaign. We are campaigning right now for Congress to pass a care infrastructure bill that includes investments in home and community-based services, paid leave and childcare. So we said, let's go to TikTok, we're going to create a jingle. We literally created a jingle and had influencers on TikTo create videos. So I'm definitely looking at all the new platforms and seeing where people are congregating. Even if we don't have capacity to build our own NDWA account, we can use micro-influencers, which is another thing I'll name. Micro-influencers. Definitely look into micro-influencers. And what I mean by that is you don't always need Oprah. Oprah is great, but Oprah is not really accessible. And also it can be just as impactful if you find a trusted messenger who has a really devoted audience that listens to them and engages with them, and they have, you know, 20,000 followers, but those followers have a huge engagement with them and listen to them and trust them. And these people reinforce one another's narratives. So it's very much a fishbowl instead of kind of like a microphone going out. So the messages are more likely to stick if you hear them multiple times. So definitely look into micro-influencers and invest in them and participate with them and create creative partnerships. You don't have to always create your own channel. You can use other people's channels, you can borrow other people's audiences, which is a tactic I really love. So those are some of the things I'm thinking about right now.

Makani:

Those are all great. And thank you so much. Awesome. Awesome. Awesome. So I really super appreciate your time, your brilliance, the energy, the sharing. Thank you so much.

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

Thank you for having me. I love this. I love talking about all this and I cannot wait to listen.

Makani:

I can tell. I think it's going to help so many people, you know, cause you guys' work is just absolutely brilliant and just what we need. So thank you for that.

Kristina Mevs-Apgar:

Yay! Narrative power. We're doing it. We can all do it together.

Makani:

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