

Unfinished Conversations – Liverpool

Interviewee: Brodie Arthur

Interviewer: Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Director of Photography: Darren Brady

Date of interview: Wednesday 21st May 2025

Location of interview: Toxteth Library Windsor St, Liverpool, L8 1XF, United Kingdom

Total length of recording: 34 minutes 19 Seconds

00:00:08 Brodie Arthur

Fabulous.

00:00:09 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Wait, let me put my mic on. Oh, it's on. The blue lights on, yeah.

00:00:15 Brodie Arthur

The sun's extremely oppressive today, isn't it?

00:00:16 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Hopefully it warms up your blood.

00:00:21 Brodie Arthur

I was just saying before I came here this morning, everything in terms of, like, what questions I would have gave was quite negative. Not necessarily negative, but sort of pulling out all the bad legacies. And then I went on a fabulous call with my team while we were discussing our evaluation and whatever, and then I was like, "Ooh, guys, I feel a bit more positive "about the slave trade now." I was like, "I might be a bit happier."

00:00:47 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

All right, so we're rolling, yeah. So, OK, can you tell us what your name is? And a bit about yourself, your life and your work?

00:00:57 Brodie Arthur

Yeah. I am Brodie Arthur. I'm a Black activist and artist from Liverpool 8. I grew up literally on this street, which is Windsor Street. And a bit about my work, I've spent the majority of my life working in spaces where I advocate on behalf of other people. So that might be as a support worker, advocating for young people or vulnerable adults. It might be as an activist, as a consultant, supporting businesses to do better in terms of EDI. And currently I am outreach and engagement for the Liverpool City Region Race Equality Hub.

00:01:38 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Thank you. And can you tell us a bit about this location, where we are, what it means to you and what it was like growing up on Windsor Street?

00:01:48 Brodie Arthur

God, yeah, where we are right now, there's literally a bit of grass there, which I used to frequent when I was younger, and there used to be a rose bush in there, right. We used to pull all the petals off the rose bush and throw them up in the air. And the guy who lived in the top corner flat, one day we threw them all up and he took this gorgeous picture with all the rose petals falling down and us just acting the goat.

So, this street for me, I suppose, there's loads going on on this street because I lived off the back of it. Toxteth TV is just there on the left, which is probably the first place I ever engaged in creativity.

We've got the library here to the right of us, which is where I used to go all the time. Anyone who grew up in Liverpool 8 knows that the only thing to do when we were younger was go to Davie Lewis or the Methodist or go to the library, so they were like the places where we'd go.

And then to the left of us here, we've got a mental health secure unit. Again, if you're from the area, you're more than likely probably going to have known a few people who've been in there. So, yeah, it's a bit of a bit of an all encompassing street, isn't it?

00:02:59 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Yes, thank you. And so, what's your family's background and can you speak a bit about their journey and connection to Liverpool?

00:03:10 Brodie Arthur

Yeah, so on my mum's side, my great grandmother came from Cumbria and my granddad was from the Ivory Coast. They met when my nan was moved here during the war. During the... is it the Blitz? When everywhere got bombed. And she was moved from Cumbria to Liverpool, and she met my granddad on Berkley Street and they just fell in love.

She said it was the first time she'd ever seen a black man. She'd never even read about black men like in books or anything. So, when he made a beeline for her across the road, she was terrified. And she wasn't sure what... what the interaction was going to be. But anyway, for him, it was love at first sight. And so, she already had three... three white sons who were born in Cumbria. But then she went on to have my nan and my nan's twin brother here in Toxteth. So, yeah.

And then on my dad's side. So, me nan, her mum was Cumbrian and my dad was African as well. So, so my maternal nan was a mixture of English and well, Cumbrian and African. And then on me dad's side, my granddad is Jamaican, and he now lives in London. And then my nan was a mix of African and Irish, as is my mum's heritage now, because her mum was African and her dad is Irish. So, yeah, a big mix.

00:04:35 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

And can you speak about a bit about their connection to Liverpool? So, thinking about both lineages and like when they came to Liverpool, you spoke about your nan from Cumbria and that side. But what about the journey?

00:04:52 Brodie Arthur

So my granddad was a seafarer. I'm not sure what his role was on the ships, but I know he came from Africa by ship. And probably would have landed at the docks I spoke before when I was working on the waterfront project. I realized that that moment that where I was was probably roundabout where all of my family entered the UK because our Irish roots obviously came in through the docks, as did our Africans, some in enslavement and then others willingly. But yeah, I think it wasn't until I got to the age I am now. That I started to really appreciate the journey that some of those ancestors would have made to get here. Why here? Is my thought.

00:05:40 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Yeah, and thinking now like you work on the docks, you work in race equality for the... the entire city region of Liverpool. How does that feel knowing you know, the journeys of your ancestors and the experiences of your parents and stuff. How does that feel knowing that like this is the work that you do.

00:06:00 Brodie Arthur

I think it's probably the journey that my family have taken is directly what's led me to where I am today. I think when you come from a background of oppression, also when you're growing up in an area that is underprivileged, overlooked by government and all of those other systems, it becomes your life's work to sort of fight the system, if you will.

And I suppose where I am now in terms of my career, I spent a lot of my time working self-employed, trying to tackle systemic injustices, but not quite really understanding how the system works. So, it was really difficult to navigate that sort of change everything. In 2020, I decided to take my activism and sort of the work that I'm doing to the next level. So that was when I started engaging with local authority and eventually ended up working for the Race Equality Hub. It's not a job that we take lightly. We understand that there's a lot of pressure on our shoulders because we're not only serving the communities that are here now, we're serving the communities that have been and the communities that are yet to come. And it's absolutely massive, but it's such, such rewarding work in terms of being able to be the vehicle for change, I suppose, or one of the vehicles for change.

00:07:26 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Thank you. So, moving on now. Do you remember learning about slavery as a child or a young adult? For example, did you learn from radio, TV, family, school?

00:07:41 Brodie Arthur

I think I learned briefly about it in primary school, and that was more so because a young boy called me, the n-word in class and then the teacher, like off the cuff, decided that since the class

was 90 percent black, we should probably educate the class on the legacy of racism in the city region. So, we learned a little bit. I think an example was given was like John Barnes and somebody throwing a banana at him on a pitch or something years ago. They didn't really go into much detail in terms of the city region's contributions to slave trade...the slave trade, and how that has impacted the racism that is embedded across the city region. Every system, every infrastructure that we use today is rooted in a racist system that was designed to keep people of colour at a certain level of servitude for the white counterparts.

00:08:43 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Yeah, and so then moving on, then when did you begin to learn and how did you begin to learn about Liverpool's hand in the transatlantic system?

00:08:55 Brodie Arthur

I think when I went to secondary school, I had a really amazing teacher.

00:09:01 Darren Brady

Can you start that again, you just overlapped.

00:09:02 Brodie Arthur

Yeah, no problem.

I think secondary school was when it really become apparent for me. I had a teacher, Miss Elaine Hughes, and my God, did she push me. Now, I was extremely clever anyway, but I always felt like she was just pushing me super, super hard. And then one day I was faffing about in class and she kind of like, she just took off on me and the girl next to me was a white young student. And she said to the student, you realize it's going to be four times harder for Brodie to get a job outside of school with the same qualifications as you, with the same sort of knowledge that you've got, her life expectancy is less than yours. And she hammered home for me that I just didn't have time to waste in school, essentially like white people have the privilege to mess about and you kinda don't. And it was from that moment that I started to look into, 'why does she keep saying these things to me?' 'why is she really pushing the black students in the class?'. And she was a black woman herself. And then I suppose I just started to really unpick my own identity and the suffering that was in me identity, but also the power that I could take from that. So maybe I was around about 12. Something like that.

10:20 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Yeah. And just to give some context, as you mentioned school twice, could you just say like, I went to primary school, during, whether it was noughties and then the time of the secondary school?

10:30 Brodie Arthur

Yeah. So, I went to primary school in the late... mid-nineties onto the noughties. And then I started Bellreaves Secondary School. I went to St Patrick's Primary, which is just there on Windsor Street. And then I started Bellreaves Secondary School in 2003. I was there until 2010.

10:51 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Thank you. How. How has transatlantic slavery impacted your family's life or history or even you personally?

00:11:06 Brodie Arthur

So, I suppose on loads of levels. But on a basic level, there was lots of people who I thought were our relatives because we shared the same surname. They were Jamaican. My granddad was Jamaican. We'd connected through various methods of social media, as social media developed. And then when I started to dive into my ancestry, I actually realized that I'm not blood related to half of the people who I thought I was. We shared the same surname because many centuries ago, when we were owned by a plantation owner whose surname happened to be Hamilton, all of his slaves who were his property become the property of him and thereby adopted his surname.

So, although I have got lots of blood relatives. I also have, and as they call it in Jamaica, our extended family, which is all of the people who share our surname, but we're not in any way blood related. I suppose in terms of my family's direct legacy. I suppose property is something that we inherited from directly as a result from the slave trade. So, the slave owner who I mentioned before, Mr Hamilton, he owned properties in Liverpool, which would then subsequently passed down to my granddad. I'm not sure how that came about. And my granddad passed away before I had the chance to have deeper conversations. But I just know that he was super young. He lived in London, and he inherited a load of properties here in Liverpool, came to Liverpool, used those properties to sort of boost his property career back in London. And that was the end of that.

00:12:55 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Thank you. In what ways you touched on earlier, but in what ways do you think the transatlantic slave trade has shaped Liverpool and the city?

00:13:12 Brodie Arthur

In a negative aspect, it shaped the city region.

00:13:21 Darren Brady

Sorry Brodie could you just say the transatlantic slave trade...

00:13:23 Brodie Arthur

So, for me, I suppose the transatlantic slave trade has impacted the city region in many ways. You know, all of the... the trade that came out of... out of the transatlantic slave trade is what built the city region. Not to mention it was built by black. You know. I don't like to call them slaves, but black enslaved individuals literally built most of the buildings that we see today that are in the city. The buildings that we see today that are occupied still by white corporate, you know, organisations or institutions, whatever you want to call it.

I think the city has got a really unique... a really unique feeling around it, because we are champions for people who are suffering any sort of social injustice. But there's such a real grey area when it comes to race and the city actually accepting not only its contributions to the slave trades, but also its contribution to...to upholding a racist system that has been designed to marginalise people like yourself and I. So, I think. I think we could do better in accepting our legacy. Accepting what we've done. Accepting that neither you nor I nor anyone who's in power today had a direct hand in that. So, it's not something that we need to be so precious about in terms of our embarrassment or denying the history of the city. And I think if we come to a place where we can all accept the wrongdoing that the city's done and the biases that have been embedded into all of our communities subconsciously. then we can definitely move together as one. But until that happens, I think it's had a really bad effect on the city region and one I'd love to pull apart.

00:15:27 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

You mentioned that the city's got like this unique feeling. What feelings and emotions come up for you when you think about Liverpool's history?

00:15:42 Brodie Arthur

It's a really difficult one because a lot of the time I feel like I don't even want to be here because of the trauma and sort of the ancestral wounds within my family directly and within my community. But at the same time, I feel compelled to be here because of that. And because I feel that we were brought here against our will.

And we're just constantly, constantly exemplifying, resilient and power. And I think that the city region needs that and needs strong, strong people. So, I think I'm perplexed because I hate the city on one hand, but I also love it because it made me. It made me who I am. I think the feelings are a mixture of joy, embarrassment and curiosity maybe... for the future.

00:16:39 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Thank you. Are there any stories, memories or traditions related to slavery that have been passed down by your family at all?

00:16:55 Brodie Arthur

I mean, food is a big one, isn't it? Like everybody knows that during the slave trade, the main thing that we would do to seek joy and come together was art and food. And I suppose both of those things are at the core of my being. I seen a meme the other day that said, 'Before we talk, we sing. Before we walk, we dance. Art is literally in the heart of us'.

And I think even back to the transatlantic slave trade how we used, for example, hair braiding to do a map to escape from a plantation is one example. But we would also put seeds into those braids so that when we got to the destination of freedom, we had crops that we could sow. So, it was supposed sort of the ingenuity and the way that we can just adapt it. And you can drop me anywhere and I will make something out of nothing. And that definitely comes from that. And from my family's constant need to keep going. And not just my family, all of... all our Black ancestors to just keep our people alive. So, yeah.

00:18:12 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

You mentioned art and creativity. So, you're an artist, you're a creative, you're an actress. Why do you think it's important to have these forms of art as a African Caribbean diaspora? And how would you link that with... with the personal journey of being of that diaspora?

00:18:37 Brodie Arthur

I think for one, it's important for us to be able to express ourselves in a way that is globally understood. And art is globally understood. You know we can stand in rooms a million times and moan about colonialism or the effects of the transatlantic slave trade. But if we speak in poetry. If we make a song. If we do a movie. Whatever. A dance. Whatever that piece of art might be, it tends to get responses that you wouldn't usually get.

I think society can separate the human from the art. So, art is a really powerful tool for driving messages forward. And so, in terms of us and freedom, I think it's a really... our art...our art is a signal of our freedom and some of those things that were kept from us, like education, like the ability to read and write and all of those stuff. And we've managed to harness those skills anyway and turn them into really beautiful, beautiful things. So, I think it's important for you to understand yourself and the journey that you're going on, but to be able to portray your journey to other people.

I've been to the theatre in Amsterdam. I've seen... I went to... It was part of a theatre festival called Contact in the World, where we watched 12 pieces of theatre. And out of those 12, eight of them were in different languages. And still we understood the message. Still, we understood the feelings that were supposed to be evoked were evoked. Art is just really unique and powerful.

00:20:17 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

And you've worked with some young people, local young people, local black young youth, on Black history projects as well. Can you speak a bit about that?

00:20:28 Brodie Arthur

Yeah, I think it's always really interesting in today's society working with young people. As I said before, racism and the slave trade weren't necessarily spoken about at school as much as they should have been. And as I said before, I'm not sure whether our young people are self-teaching themselves that legacy, or whether that is becoming more accessible within the curriculum. But I just thought it was really wholesome working with a group of young people who had a different knowledge of the transatlantic slave trade to what I had. They'd been exposed to different stories, different legacies. you know. really powerful stories of resilience and survival that I'd never been aware of. And they helped me to look at the smaller ways that we can influence the system ourselves and how to reframe some of that pain into power.

00:21:26 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Thank you. Are there any individuals, heroes or communities that you think have been forgotten in the history of slavery? Who are they and can you tell us a bit about them?

00:21:40 Brodie Arthur

I'm not quite sure if... I mean, I don't know how well known this person is. So, there's a gentleman, less about the slave trade, but more about what came after. His name was William Cuffay, if I'm pronouncing that correctly. And he was the child of an enslaved African father. And he was a really, really huge black political, what you would call an influencer in today's society. And he really championed lots of things in terms of workers' rights. You know, he was a social activist. He was an activist in general, fighting for the freedom of the enslaved Africans and other minoritised communities. And I don't think we hear much about him, but a lot of his work was really rooted in post abolition, sort of solidifying those freedoms within policy or trying to solidify those freedoms within policy. And I've wrote a little bit of a play about him, which I'm sure I'll put on at some point. But he's a person that comes to mind in terms of forgotten legacies.

00:22:52 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Are there any local heroes that you think have been like monumental in Liverpool's black history and black activism?

00:23:04 Brodie Arthur

So many, too many to mention. And I think I don't like to...

Yeah.

So, I suppose in Liverpool, we've got so many pivotal figures who've moved the dial in terms of social justice for our communities. And I wouldn't like to pinpoint specific people. But those people who sort of impacted me when I was younger, I had an uncle, he's passed away now. His name was Kenneth White. And he was such a stickler for like articulation and how we present ourselves as black people. And he had all these little phrases that he would like drum into us. So, like if our mum would say a swear word, he'd say things like "expletives impoverishes one's vocabulary, Angela". And he'd just really try and bring us up to the level of what the white corporate world would expect you to be.

And at the time when I was younger, I just thought, oh, bore off. But as I got older, I realised, oh, my God, he totally understood the system. He understood the barriers that I was going to face as I was older. And he really worked towards me engaging in other stuff. So, you know, he linked me in with Michelle Charters when I was about 10, the first ever creative project I done was at Toxteth TV. And I just think he was pivotal in my in shaping me into the individual I am today. And had he not have instilled some of those values into me, I didn't think I'd have got into the rooms that I got into. So, yeah, he's a person for me.

00:24:42 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Thank you. Thank you. So what does freedom mean to you?

00:24:53 Brodie Arthur

Hmm. I don't know. I don't think I've quite reached freedom yet. So until I feel free, I don't think I'll know what freedom is. But freedom in my mind is the ability to be who I am, see myself

represented in society and exist without, without what's the word... without responsibility, like to just be is enough. And I think in today's society and I don't mean just for Black Asian ethnic minority people whilst it's... it's emphasized more in our communities. But I think there's such a focus on being fast, moving, everything has to always be going, especially in city life. And I think for me, freedom is the ability to be able to rest. And I'm not there yet.

00:25:59 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Yeah. And if you if you think about what freedom would feel like, could you give us three words that come to your mind?

00:26:11 Brodie Arthur

Light as in like no gravity, you know, just like.

00:26:19 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Can you say freedom in three words.

00:26:21 Brodie Arthur

So, freedom in three words for me would be light, expressive and all-encompassing.

00:26:33 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Lovely. And then flipping it then thinking about resistance. What does resistance mean to you?

00:26:42 Brodie Arthur

Resistance for me is waking up every day and continuing to live in a world that does not want me or in a society that does not want me, that does not accept me for the way that I am. Just me showing up for myself is resistance. And I'll continue to do that.

00:27:04 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

And have you have you got any examples of like resistance by like local communities or like any movements or any people that you think, wow, like, you know, they're resistant in this way, this type of way or they resisted doing this?

00:27:42 Brodie Arthur

Yeah. I mean, I think if you look now at the Caribbean centre and what's going on with the council and the relationships between the council and our community, that's a massive show of resistance. Everybody coming together to save the centre.

We think when I was younger, it's always it's always similar situations. So when I was younger, my first chance at campaigning to save any sort of organization or building was the Davey Lewis Youth Club. And we started the campaign called 'Save the Davey'. And we did not save the Davey, but what we did save was the community spirit. And that group of young people who went to the

Davey Lewis are still connected now to this day and have a really tight friendship that has just gone beyond any building could capture.

But I think in our community, historically, we've had lots of trying times. And I think we all come together as one when... when we need to. And that for me is the biggest mark of resistance. We show up when we need to.

00:28:32 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Yeah. And is there anything else that we're on this whole topic of transatlantic slavery and Liverpool's legacy, you and your family's background? Is there anything else that you like want to say?

28:49 Brodie Arthur

Not that I can think of no. OK. Thank you.

00:28:49 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

What do you think?

00:28:55 Alexander Scott

So, this is Alexander Scott quite a specific question I suppose. So just think of it as a way of making it a bit more interesting. You just mentioned Toxteth TV several times. So it would be good just kind of like a few lines explaining what that is. And if you've got anything to say like what we did in there, it just seems like it would be, could you ask the question please Elliss.

00:29:17 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

So you mentioned Toxteth TV earlier. Can you tell us a bit more about what Toxteth TV is and what it was used for and stuff like that?

00:29:26 Brodie Arthur

So Toxteth TV is a creative hub, which was once home to Liverpool TV or Bay TV. And there's lots of different things inside there. So it uses... its multi-purpose. So some offices are hired out. Most of the organizations who occupy those offices are creative organizations within the city region. You've got an artist management company in there, RBA Management. You've got Blackfest. You've got 20 stories high. Hip hop... Hip hop. What is? I forget what the name of the company is, but it's Tony and Nikki Blaze, their company is in there as well. There's lots of stuff in there. But when we were younger, the building was a lot more utilized. So you had youth workers running creative projects. So the first project I ever got involved in there was a youth film that we wrote, directed and starred in ourselves. And we used the studio. It was the first time we'd ever used, like, green screen and editing equipment and stuff like that. And we got a full program of not only learning how to act and how to be on screen and stuff like that, but we also learned some of the behind the scenes jobs. Probably one of the first places I ever decided I wanted to be in the art industry.

00:30:53 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Thank you. Anything else?

00:30:58 Alexander Scott

The one thing that I've realized, but I mean, it's a big two...

00:31:02 Brodie Arthur

Can I move?

00:31:04 Alexander Scott

Probably too big of a question for one person is that we probably do with explaining the history of Irish immigration to Liverpool. We've kind of just taken it as read.

00:31:14 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Yeah.

00:31:14 Alexander Scott

But I don't know whether. I can't put that on Brodie to try and do.

00:31:19 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Yeah.

Is there anything that you could say about...

00:31:25 Brodie Arthur

I mean, I can talk about my own family. Why they're here. But I don't know if that's that. Well, it's what they called the potato famine. But essentially similar to what we're seeing today in Gaza.

00:31:38 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

And then just speak about... maybe speak about that integration. If you think about the integration of Irish people in Liverpool 8. Yeah.

00:31:48 Brodie Arthur

Yeah.

00:31:48 Alexander Scott

Is that ok Darren?

00:31:51 Darren Brady

The batteries died on this and I don't know when.

00:32:02 Brodie Arthur

Oh.

00:32:05 Alexander Scott

Feeling ok?

00:32:05 Brodie Arthur

Yeah, that was really good. I think I might need to stretch.

00:32:34 Brodie Arthur

Are you going to ask the question.

00:32:35 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Yeah. So you're of Irish heritage as well as African Caribbean heritage. Can you speak a bit about that integration? Of them different.

00:32:50 Brodie Arthur

Yeah. I suppose in in Liverpool; you see a lot of mixed heritage families and the background usually as Caribbean Irish or African Irish. And I suppose there's multiple reasons why those two communities ended up so closely linked because we had similar struggles in terms of marginalization. You know, we're all familiar with the phrase no blacks, no Irish, no dogs. And so, I suppose when resource was being strategically withdrawn out of out of Ireland, all of their resource and they were struggling to survive in terms of food, finance. You know, we called it the potato famine. I would call it exploitation as it always is. But we've seen a huge influx of Irish residents coming to Liverpool for a better day as. Shall we start again?

00:33:44 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

No, it's OK.

00:33:46 Brodie Arthur

Oh, so sorry. And we've seen a large influx of Irish people coming over during the potato famine. And I suppose they saw a likeness of themselves in the black communities. So, you know, my granddad's family were Irish and his... his mum and dad came here. So, my granddad was born here, but my great grandparent are Irish. And I suppose when my granddad met my Nana Betty who was from Toxteth, he was from an Irish family who'd been very much oppressed in similar ways. He said he just saw himself in my nan. And even though they had completely different lives and faced completely different sort of abuse in Liverpool City region, they came together because

they had a shared understanding of the struggle and what it was like to be othered. So, whilst my granddad could go into a nightclub in town and not, you know, be slapped in the face, my nan couldn't. They still just had this sort of unspoken kind of bond. And I think even now today, any Irish people I speak to, the first thing we say is, oh, you and I are the same. No blacks, no Irish. And I'm like, oh, yeah, same. So, yeah, I think it's just one of those things in this city. We all just we all understand struggle and scousers are so hospitable that we just see traits of ourselves as the black community in the Irish community. And I think that's why so many of us ended up in relationships together.

00:35:21 Elliss Eyo-Thompson

Great.

00:35:21 Brodie Arthur

Is that okay?

END OF TRANSCRIPT