

## Dr Eburn Joseph

### reflection questions & episode transcript

In a typical year, Corrymeela's meeting rooms — and dining and welcome areas — are filled with people discussing matters of politics, history and religion that have separated them. During this time of Covid, we are providing you with a transcript of each podcast episode, along with some discussion questions, to aid your consideration of the themes which emerge. You may wish to discuss these questions with friends, family, a group you establish on zoom, or use them for your own writing and consideration.

In group discussions at Corrymeela, we seek to locate political and religious points of view within the story of the person speaking. If you're gathering as a group, consider how to create a sense of connectedness within the group. It might help to choose one of the [Very Short Story Questions](#). As with any group process, if you are talking about this episode with others, make sure to check that people feel safe enough, that the time is right for them, and make it easy for anyone who wishes to keep their considerations to themselves, or for anyone who doesn't wish to join such a conversation.

1. Eburn Joseph speaks about the increasing difficulties in Ireland for Black and Brown people, in comparison with twenty years ago, when she says there was more openness. Have you seen this in your environment? And if you have a point of view on this, how do you measure it? Is it from personal experience or from what you wish to be true?
2. Eburn Joseph speaks about the power of seeking and amplifying 'counter-stories'. Where do you see the need for counter-stories in your city or community or country? What hurdles might be in the way of making these alternative narratives more widely heard?
3. Eburn Joseph's analysis of employment data in Ireland suggests, possibly contrary to the public narrative, that people's chances of success in the labour market are impacted by their race. What are the unacknowledged powers influencing employment, promotion and income in your environments?

You can find out more about Dr Eburn Joseph's work at [University College Dublin here](#), or follow her on Twitter at [@EburnJoseph](#). Her academic text book [Critical race theory and inequality in the labour market; Racial stratification in Ireland, can be bought here](#).

## The Corrymeela Podcast. Interview with Dr. Eburn Joseph. Transcript.

Welcome to The Corrymeela Podcast. My name is Pádraig Ó Tuama. In the first year of Brexit, and a century after the partition of Ireland, I'm in conversation with special guests, exploring contemporary Irishness and Britishness through the lenses of history, politics, art and theology.

This week I'm delighted that my guest is Dr. Eburn Joseph. She is an author, social justice activist and public speaker. But she's probably best known for setting up Ireland's first Black Studies module, at University College Dublin:

*“Racism is four or five hundred years old, we didn't create it; I didn't create it, you didn't create it. So we don't need white guilt- it's of no use to anybody...”*

*“...we become angry, we panic, because we think: oh, they're calling me a white supremacist, and that paints the picture of the KKK and the white hood. I'm like: no, white supremacy is really about believing that one group is better than the other; superior to the other”.*

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

Hello, and welcome to The Corrymeela Podcast. My name is Pádraig Ó Tuama, and with me today is Dr. Eburn Joseph. Eburn is an author and lecturer and career coach and director of the Institute of Antiracism and Black Studies at University College Dublin. Eburn, welcome to The Corrymeela Podcast.

**Dr. Eburn Joseph:**

Thank you so much for this opportunity to be with your audience.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

It's a pleasure to have you. Just as we start, where are you talking to us from today?

**Dr. Eburn Joseph:**

I'm in Dublin, in Ireland.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

You have had a hugely varied career, and reading through your CV and your publications you've taken in writing and speaking and counselling and research and microbiology, as well as activism. Would you say that there's one particular interest that has held all of those together? Or are they just indicative of a variety of interests in your life?

**Dr. Eburn Joseph:**

No, I think that through all of it, there's one key thing that has come out, and that is my desire to change inequality. I don't like inequality, I mean, I want to use a stronger word, but I don't know who is listening so I'm going to try not to use a stronger word... But yes, I don't like inequality, injustice- I don't like it. So I think through all of everything, you know, so whether it's career guidance that I have done; you will see me trying to help the person at the bottom, trying

to help them find themselves, find their identities; how to navigate difficult spaces, navigate racial spaces in the labour market. So you would see all of those things: helping people to believe in themselves.... Even in my lecturing in Black Studies again, you will see that. So I think- and even some of the work I did as well; my starting work in all of this has been on gender inequality. So again, so you would see that, so yes: I think the strong theme that runs through everything in my life is just that injustice and inequality. I don't like it.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

I'm struck, Ebum, that you were saying that there's stronger words you'd want to use, but you'd be cautious about the audience. Would you mind saying what the stronger words are?

**Dr. Ebum Joseph:**

No, I think I was just gonna say I hate inequality!

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

OK!

**Dr. Ebum Joseph:**

So those would be the strong words, something like... OK, before somebody says: 'oh, she's always so passionate!' you know? Yeah, well, so I'm always passionate, you know, like, I bring, I bring my A-game all the time; I bring all my passion in everything that I do, and I don't think that anything is worth doing if you're not passionate about it... So yeah, so I feel strongly about inequality. And I think when I start talking, you know, like, I always start talking with this really good mind that I'm gonna be very calm, I'm gonna sound... but then halfway through I just forget!

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

Well I'm delighted that you've forgotten right at the start! Or [are] choosing to forget, yeah. You've lived in Ireland for the last 20 years- you've made Ireland your home. What brought you to Ireland and have you noticed changes in Ireland over these last 20 years?

**Dr. Ebum Joseph:**

I think that I have noticed some of the key change... I mean, I've noticed changes in Ireland, you know, we all migrate for different reasons. And I think that some of the key changes- when I first came to Ireland, there was a- there was more of an openness. And I think it sounds strange to say that, but we had all of that openness to learn, to recognise, to know the other, you know; there were activities, there were groups, there were funded organisations, the theme there was recognition of difference, you know, celebrating difference... So, yeah, between 2002 and 2005, there was a great, you know, desire to, to recognise difference, to welcome difference, you know?

I don't know, for now, like, if I look back then to where I am now - and even getting a job for me - like, I think my first paid job that I got in Ireland, I got that job, even without literally having so much of the practical experience. Because what I did was, I talked about the fact that I'm a, I'm a mother, because my first job then, because I was schooling full time, and I wanted a job I could do, you know, like weekends, or in the evenings on a Sunday, you know, to, to be able to pay some bills and all of those things. So, you know, care offered me (working in home support as a home support worker, you know, for older people within their homes) that really offered me the opportunity to manage my education,

and at the same time, still be able to work those hours when I was not in college. You know, but that first job, when I got it, I didn't have like practical- I had never worked in care, you know, but when I went for that interview, I told them, I said: I'm a mother, I have two young people, you know, in my care, and I take care of them; I'm able to keep them safe. And I think I can bring - and I come from an African background, you know, where we are used to taking care of each other, taking care of our older relations and all - and that was enough, you know, for me to get a job and you know, I guess maybe also, maybe the sector, the field, you know: care has always been one place where as a black person, it's easy for you to go into the labour market. So maybe that made a difference there as well. I don't know.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

You've written that Ireland has come late to being more racially diverse, you know, obviously, there's always been black and brown Irish people, but the population has grown. Do you think that Ireland has learned from other places in terms of having better policies and better community and dialogue about recognising racial diversity? Or do you think Ireland has been committed to making the same mistakes as other places and dragging that out in terms of the improvement and the commitment to antiracism?

**Dr. Eburn Joseph:**

I would say that I am really surprised that we are making exactly the same mistakes, you know, we're going down that same route. And I think it's a missed opportunity. You know, like, when I did my research, I said that, you know, one of the benefits of my research was because of the not so new, like mass in bigger numbers, you know- it's less than 20/25 years, where we've had a bit larger numbers of people migrating to Ireland. So it's really meant that we were still at that stage where I could see that organic state of formation, you know, before we have two/three/four/five generations... So I could still see that organic stage where people are assimilating or acculturation [is] impacting on people. So I could still see some of all of those things. And I think that those were things that helped my work, you know, to be impactful. Yes, I would have expected a bit more that we would have looked at the UK and looked at France to say, you know, how did they do it? Now we're getting these larger numbers of people coming in, what can we do, particularly even when we had the ascension states, you know, and Eastern Europeans came in to Ireland as well, you know, we could have- we could have learned from that, and I think we did not.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

I remember a number of years ago, a book that changed me entirely was reading Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White*. Because I think, you know, my own reading in history, through school (and I'm an Irish language speaker, as well) and so I think there had been lots of awareness of Irish suffering in Ireland. And Ignatiev really drives a spear through that. And, Ignatiev really challenges that, and says, you know, when the Irish left Ireland, and landed particularly in the United States, often after the famine, that's when the Irish became what he calls 'white', which isn't about the colour of your skin, but it was about the practice of power, and the practice of discrimination, and particularly deliberate exclusions. And that changed the way I thought about Irish history enormously. It didn't do away, obviously, with the famine, and with poverty and the eradication of the Irish language. But it totally did challenge me to realise: my God, Irish people, when they migrated - when *we* migrated - from Ireland, began to realise how white we were and how that could be used as an economy. Have you found in - I know you quote Noel Ignatiev as well - have you found in your research that people are familiar with this aspect of Irishness and whiteness? Or is that new for people?

**Dr. Eburn Joseph:**

No, I think that those who know it, know it, but the majority of our population are not able to connect with the whiteness of- with Irish whiteness. I think we're able to connect with the benefits, with the, with the privileges and the benefits that it brings, without understanding the implication... We call that the wages of whiteness, you know, and how the price, you know- I'm trying to write an article now on the price of Irish whiteness: what did it cost us? What did it cost us to... to take on that whiteness? You know, and I think that that is the missing link, you know, that we are not very - the majority of our population, I should say - are not conversant, you know, that whiteness comes at a price; that you actually don't just get the whiteness, it's like, you know, it's like you buy into something, you know, becoming white... how the Irish became white: at what cost? What did it cost us? What did we have to give up? What did we buy into? It meant the minute we became white, it meant we bought in - as a nation, as a people - we bought into this concept of superiority of one group over another. And so you know, like you said, it's not just the whiteness of skin colour, it's all of that symbolic whiteness, you know, it's that whiteness, where one language, one way of speaking, one way of being, you know, is superior. So whether it's in the music, or it's in the food, or it's in how people speak... So we bought into that, you know, but it was at a price and I think Ignatiev's book does that really well, as well.

And there's a lot of literature, and I write about that: the currency, you know, of Irish whiteness, you know, and so look at that. So I think many of us are not, you know, aware of that price of whiteness, and so when we hear ideas, or when somebody mentions the word 'white supremacy', we panic, you know, we become angry, we panic, because we think: oh, they're calling me a white supremacist, and that paints the picture of the KKK and the white hood. I'm like: no, you know, white supremacy is really about believing that one group is better than the other, superior to the other. And when we buy into whiteness, we buy into the structure and the systems that believe that.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

I know that Freud spoke about the tyranny of small differences, where often places or even individuals who are nearby each other kind of exacerbate their differences with each other. And I think it's true to say that lots of white Irish people have spent a lot of time thinking about how we are not British. And that's true, we're not- we have a distinct history, and Britain is a bigger power; there's an Irish language and all of those things. But I think when we step back, we realise that, in the midst of the tyranny of small differences, there is a complicity of larger similarities, which is the practice of empire and whiteness as you look at Irish and British people across the world. And that, I think, has often been for me - and for other people I know - that's been a shock, to realise that the amount of energy that Irish people spend in proving we're not British, actually can often be an excuse to, to justify not facing up to the impact of Irish whiteness across the world.

**Dr. Eburn Joseph:**

Absolutely. And I think you say that so well there, you know. Even white migrants (you know, people who are of migrant descent who come into Ireland) you know, they have two identities that they grapple with: so they have the identity of immigrant, and they have the identity of whiteness. And so when they come into the labour market in Ireland, they have to accept one over the other. So, while they are impacted by both of them, white immigrants, when they come in, they have to then lean more towards their white identity, because what it then does, rather than their immigrant identity (even while they are impacted by that, but they have those two identities) so they lean more towards their whiteness, their white identity, because it also helps to protect them a little bit from starting at the bottom of the racial ladder. And I said that with every time we choose that, and we lean towards our whiteness, we have to become

defenders of white supremacy. Now remember, I'm not talking of white supremacist extremism, you know, that idea of white supremacy is that one group is superior to the other. So we structure - even immigration, the way we, our government - everything is structured to promoting one group over another, you know, and so, as in everything, too much of everything is bad. So the same thing- when people are too much of, you know, white superiority, they become extremists, you know, and so those are, those are the extremists that are the overt kind of, you know, dangerous. (Well, everything is dangerous anyway, you know, but they become the overt display of supremacy). But yes, it is a buy-in, the minute we buy-in, you know; so whether you're a white immigrant who's coming to Ireland to work and you identify with your whiteness over your immigrant status, then at that point in time, whether we're white Irish or immigrant Irish, we have to then become defenders of white supremacy.

You see that and the quick example I can give is, you know, I always say that: what is it that, you know, you hear... so for example, say as a black woman, I'm telling you (or your black colleague or your-) is telling you of their experience of racism: that this happened to me. Think about it. Nine out of ten people who hear that this is my experience, or this is this person's experience of racism, the first thing they begin to do, they begin to say: oh, maybe they didn't mean it like that. Maybe it was a bit of a joke, maybe- d'you know: they begin to excuse a person who they have not seen. The person who is standing before you and actually explaining: I'm telling you via experience, right? We are actually trying to defend somebody who is not there. And so that's why I call it that, when we buy into whiteness, we actually then also become defenders of white supremacy. We don't actually know what we're defending, but it's like an automatic thing within us: it kicks in; we just begin to defend the thing- oh, maybe they didn't mean it. Maybe, you know, maybe you read it wrongly, you know, and all of that. So yeah, so those are key things, I think, when we talk about, you know, fragility and learning, all of those things, those are things we need to begin to learn to understand, and that helps us in that process of active unlearning.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama;**

Ebun, I'm conscious that often when we are speaking as Irish people about racism, what we are speaking about is not trying to find out the stories of black Irish people, it's speaking about the practice of white Irishness. And here's me, a white Irish man, speaking to you, a black Irish woman; are white people doing enough to combat racism in our society, or I suppose to put our own whiteness under the microscope?

**Dr. Ebum Joseph:**

I think that those are two questions, you know, so I will try and break them down. So I think that on the one hand, white people are willing to do as much as they can, you know, to combat racism. So for example, we can listen to your stories, and we can feel sorry, and we can, you know, some of us even end up feeling guilty, which I always say: please don't feel guilty, because we inherited this racism that we have today. Racism is four or five hundred years old, we didn't create it; I didn't create it, you didn't create it. So we don't need white guilt- it's of no use to anybody, because sometimes our guilt absolves us of responsibility. It absolves us of action, you know. So it's not about guilt, because we did not create it, you know, so it's really what we do, the minute we realise that there is racism; [it's] what we do with the racism we've become aware of that is the difference, not about the guilt.

So a lot of white people that I have come across and in my work with organisations, with people, with individuals, is, we're willing to do the learning, you know, we're willing to talk, to listen to stories and all of those things. But the other side of making this change is that we are- we are not willing to look at the white systems of operation; we're not

willing to look at our own whiteness, we're not even willing to go to that conversation of white privilege. That is- I mean, I think that is one of the most difficult topics I have ever taught. The minute you begin to talk about whiteness, you lose, you know, a couple of people in the audience. So I have over the years had to learn how to find- I think the idea of stratification helps me to explain it without losing audience. Yes, but the minute- so we're not able to look at our own whiteness; we're not actually able to look at whiteness in our systems, our policies that actually promote whiteness, it's one of the most difficult things to do. And I absolutely get it, I absolutely understand it. Because when you're looking at the notion of whiteness, it means it begins to challenge all your belief system about meritocracy.

You know, it is a change in positioning, you know, and it is a difficult, uncomfortable position or conversation to have, to reflect on. So I think for me, that is the biggest challenge. It's not enough to hear the stories, it's not enough to even read the books, unless we're able to put our systems of operation under the microscope. Because it is a systemic change that we need. Unless we're willing to look at that, look at our own networks that are strictly white, completely white; look at the stories we tell that perpetuate whiteness in our workspaces, you know, then we're not able to do the work. And that's why you see a lot of organisations and companies; individuals who are self-proclaimed allies and are being performative. Because the deeper work, that uncomfortable space is completely uncomfortable, and we're unwilling to go there. So I always encourage people by saying: I know it's going to be uncomfortable. But if you really want to do this work and you really want to do the change, you want to stay with the uncomfortableness. It's like going to a doctor. You know, they tell you, you know, this injection is gonna be a little bit uncomfortable, but you will get better after that, so it's really how we transcend, you know, that level of uncomfortableness that comes from being exposed to the notion of whiteness.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

One of the areas that you've been involved in systemic change has been in education. You coordinated the first black studies module in Ireland, taught at University College, Dublin. Could you tell us a little bit about the decision to do that, and the process to do that, and then what you've noticed from teaching this course?

**Dr. Eburn Joseph:**

I think that for me, that has been one of the most fulfilling things I've done in Ireland (well, apart from giving birth to my two boys, you know!) but that has been one of the most fulfilling things I have done. The reason I realised that it was absolutely important for us to have a module or a course in Black Studies, was, if you look at it - and it is Carter G. Woodson, who writes about that - that only the education of a black person in the Western world actually starts with learning about other people than their own identity, and than their own stuff. When we look at race, racisms, and how it operates... Racisms are tied to ideas, tied to racist policies, tied to stereotypes that we hold about some people and groups of people; where do those stereotypes come from? Many of us who are alive today, we were not alive during the time of slavery. So where have those ideas been perpetuated?

So Black Studies is really looking at the fact that history has been distorted. And that this distortion of history was deliberate. And for us to be able to change the stereotypes, the views, the beliefs that we hold about a group of people, we need to teach it from a non- Eurocentric point of view. If you look at our schools, when we teach about Africa, all we teach about Africa starts from the struggle. I'm like: no, who were these people before their struggle began? And then when you teach about their struggle, do you teach about it as just a struggle- their enslavement? Or do you teach about it in a way to say: this was actually survival. So right now, I'm beginning to look at slavery as, you know, a group

of people who were enslaved, but they survived; despite all that the race went through, look at where they are today. So it's really about how we teach about Africa, how we teach about black people, you know, and that's how we begin to change the stereotypes, the mindset; remember that whiteness is built on racism, and racism is the idea that one group are better than the other; one group are superior to the other. And that one group is subhuman- we cannot run away from it. That is where racism started. And racism gave birth to race, the way it is defined today.

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**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

**You're listening to The Corrymeela Podcast and I'm Pádraig Ó Tuama. With me today is author, lecturer and antiracism activist, Dr. Eburn Joseph.**

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

Eburn, your most recent book was published by Manchester University Press in the summer of 2020. And the full title is: *Critical Race Theory and Inequality in the Labour Market: Racial Stratification in Ireland*. You've already spoken a little bit about racial stratification, and it'd be great to explore that a little bit deeper. But first of all, how did the book come about?

**Dr. Eburn Joseph:**

It came about because I was working- actually it's my project from my doctorate. So it's like, my life- it's become my baby. I know it like the back of my hand now.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

Your third Irish son!

**Dr. Eburn Joseph:**

Absolutely! I spent three years, you know, just looking at the idea of stratification. But it came about unplanned actually, because when I was working - with business in the community then - I used to observe that when the client- (we were supporting, you know, people of migrant descent to find work, you know: to navigate the labour market). What I found then was that, if you were- our black clients who came, it took me like two to three years to be able to help them navigate even unpaid work. It took that long for them to navigate the labour market, while white clients - you know, from Eastern or Western Europe - even when their English was not as good as the African people who came to us, it- you know, within three to six months, even nine months, we're able to help them navigate - whether it's paid work, you know, different kinds of work - we're able to help them navigate. And I wanted to understand why. I mean, I knew that OK, yeah, this is racism going on. But how do you explain it? You know, it's not like they take anyone apart



and say: hey, you know, this group of people- be racist to them, this group of people be racist.... So how? I wanted to be able to understand it, because sometimes people tell you that: oh, you know, it's because people are immigrants. I'm like, OK, if it is because people are immigrants, then everybody who comes to Ireland who is an immigrant should have the same kind of experience. But that's not the case.

Some migrants who come to Ireland have- you know, their mobility in the labour market is faster than the other. So for me, that was where I began to investigate to see like, what, how, you know, what accounts for this inequality in the labour market? How can I explain it? I wanted to understand it for myself, you know: how is it that the same group of people (whether you're in France, or you're in New York, or you're in Dublin, or you're in London), you know, the same group of people are at the bottom of the racial ladder. Why? You know, so I wanted to understand that. So that's really how the book came about.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

And what were some of your findings about those very serious questions?

**Dr. Ebum Joseph:**

I think one of the key thing[s] I found is that there is a system, so depending on your skin colour, depending on your race, depending on your nationality of descent, you have [been] positioned on a particular racial order. So the thing is, there are two orders: there is a racial order and there is an economic strata; so people can be on an economic strata, you know- you can work really, really hard; become a professor or become an engineer or become a doctor. So economic strata you have [been] lifted up, you're not at the bottom of the economic strata. So you are in the middle or at the top. So that's class. But the minute you go out from your house - yes, you are at the top of the economic ladder - but when you go out of your house, and you're walking down the street, you are no longer your economic ladder (particularly from people who don't know you), you become your racial strata. And that racial strata is a system of homogenization. I describe it as a homogenising system, you know, of structured inequality.

What this then means is that people, based on where they are from, based on how they look; based on their nationality of descent, their blood, their descent, their ancestry; they are given a strata and the darker you are, the lower on that strata you are. So even the GDP of the person's country of descent is used to decide, you know, how low on that strata you are. So everywhere in the world, you are on that strata. And when people meet you, even when recruiters are trying to recruit, when they're trying to promote, you become that racial strata, you know, so that's how we're able to reproduce people on that ladder. So you look at it, sometimes we say that: oh, you know, we talk about outcome- where people end up. I'm like: no, think about it- racial stratification means that some people start at the bottom.

So in Ireland, the racial order that operates is: black people are at the bottom, you know, Eastern Europeans are somewhere in the middle, Western Europeans are above the Eastern Europeans, and the white Irish population are at the top. Now, again, you know, a bit of variation there, but again, I explain how even the three groups at the top, even while they are all whites, there is a variation. For example, a white woman who suddenly wears a hijab, while she's white, on that strata she is no longer as white because the hijab that she wears has darkened her and she has moved down on that racial strata. So there is two orders: an economic stratification and a racial stratification. You can change your economic positioning on the order, but you cannot change your racial strata on that ladder. Every time others see you, you become your name, where you're from, rather than who you are, what you achieved.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

Was your choice to look at this through the lens of the labour market a deliberate choice to be able to critique, you know, the way you said earlier on that somebody will detail an experience of discrimination, and lots of white Irish people might go: ah, but let me explain, or: let's give this other discriminating person the benefit of the doubt. Were you choosing to analyse the labour market so that you could say: well, let's look at this through the cold facts of the labour market in order to be able to demonstrate this without recourse to justification through excuses? Or was there another reason that you chose to look at the labour market?

**Dr. Ebum Joseph:**

I think that, you know, because, I mean, I was being impacted by the labour market. I have two boys who are growing, and I wanted to also make sure that, you know, OK, if I'm investing in their lives, and making them stay up and study all night (you know, again I'm a typical African mum!) if I was, you know, making them stay up and study all night, you know, that they will be treated on the basis of their merits, you know. I wanted to be sure that my investment in them was not going to be wasted. I wanted to also be able to support my clients... I wanted to be able to also support my clients; to say: you know what, pull yourself up by the, you know, straps of your boot[s], [and] it would work.

So I wanted to- actually wanted to know, I didn't know, you know- I couldn't even articulate it. I wanted to be able to understand, you know- I didn't even know the notion of racial stratification when I started doing that piece of research, you know, but it was in the course of studying and interviewing people, and using critical race theory, then I was like: oh, my God, like, it just totally, it was just totally- it explained it so well, you know, because outcome... And I was gonna say that when we look at where people end up, we think that, you know, it's about where people end up: oh 15%, you know, likely to be unemployed, or, you know, an unemployment rate is 40%... I'm like: no, it's not about where people end up, it's about where people start. If people start so [much] further down the ladder, where they end up becomes almost inevitable unless they have to work one/two/three/four or five times as hard to be able to achieve the same result as people who are stratified above them.

So racial stratification for me really gives me - and I think when I explain it, when I show my charts, read my book - honestly, people get it, you know. And that's how you can see how privilege- when we talk about white privilege, what white privilege does- it doesn't mean you didn't work hard, it just means that on that strata, you did not start at the bottom, you started three notches away from the bottom, you know, so it's like running a race. When you say: you know what, I'll give you a head start. So you start 50 metres ahead, and I start, you know, at this point, so you're competing with people who are starting far back beyond/below you, you know. I'm not going to go into the justifications: oh, but they are not Irish, oh, but we're Irish, our grandparents worked here... you know, those are the justifications. I'm not gonna go into those justifications; what my work is to show you the impact, that when we favour what looks like us, this is the impact. This is the impact on people who are disfavoured, this is the impact on those who are minorities, this is the impact on those who are at the bottom of the ladder.

The key thing I always ask people is - when they tell me that society is hierarchical - then I say: what is life like, for those at the bottom of the ladder? Remember, you know, it is always about how we treat those at the bottom; those at the top- they're fine, it is how we treat the people who are at the bottom, those who are marginalised; that really begins to tell us of our strengths, whether we're welcoming, whether we're empathic; that's where we begin to see who we

really, really are. It's not how you treat rich people. It's not how you treat people who are OK, it's how you treat - how we, all of us - treat those who are at the bottom of the ladder. That is what shows up, you know, who we really, really are.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

You've been outspoken against Direct Provision, you know, the system in Ireland that was put in place to house individuals and families who are going through the process of seeking asylum. And you've also been outspoken about discrimination against travelling communities. So I can hear in your work and in your writing an awareness to say: look at the populations of people who are being mistreated, and to evaluate a country's policies and practices through the lens of that. Has that won you listeners? Or has that won you people who want to fight back? Or has that won you opportunities to influence the change in policies? I'm curious about your- about the impact of your commitment to paying attention to all kinds of aspects of Irish discrimination.

**Dr. Ebum Joseph:**

I think that it has done all of the things you've mentioned, and I think one of the key things which I like about my work is that I write in a way that the end users can actually read it and see themselves in the book, you know. So for example, I write about the five stories, you know, the experiences of people in the labour market - going around in circles, guilty until proven innocent - so people of migrant descent, they're really like: 'oh my god, Ebum, that's totally my story' you know, and so that's fantastic, and I didn't talk to them. So I write, you know, in a way that the end users can actually see themselves in it; find the words to explain their experience. But it does one other thing for them, in that it shows them that: OK I'm not mad, you know, this gaslighting that people do. They actually almost make you feel like something is wrong with you; you're over-exaggerating, it's not really true. So when they see, you know, I write it in such a way that they can actually see it. I think, you know, many people are blessed by that.

But I've also gotten a few enemies, you know, I've gotten a troll account, you know, people who troll me. There are some, they just wake up every day, and they write a whole article about me, and they put them in all those media things, you know (I won't mention their name and give them space on this, you know) but yes, I have some parodies. So again, let me use this opportunity to say to people: if you're following Ebum Joseph, make sure it's not 'Ebony', my name is not Ebony, it's E-B-U-N: Ebum. So there is a troll account on Twitter there, you know, that has my face. Twitter refuses to take it down. I mean, so yes, so I've got some threats, you know, I've got death threats. I've got, you know, people who send me crazy emails, you know, insults, so I have all of those. And, you know, sometimes you have to then decide: OK, is this worth speaking up, is this not worth speaking up? You know, yeah, sometimes you wake up, and you just go to (you know, you're on television, on radio, you know) sometimes ... like your emotions get the better of you, and you say stuff. You know, you've not thought twice about how to make it sound P.C. you know? So yes, I've got a few friends and a few enemies. But look, you know, we have to stand for something.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

You've written about the usefulness of counter-storytelling; could you tell us a bit about counter-storytelling and how you've found it useful in your work?

**Dr. Eburn Joseph:**

I love counter-storytelling. Because it is absolutely, really, really important for me, because counter-stories are, you know, if you look at it, counter-stories help you to tell the other aspect, you know, of the stories; the part- the hidden, you know, the hidden aspects that people don't talk about. What I did with a lot of my stories is, you know, like you, you hear 20 different stories. Composite counter-stories are one of the key things I try to do: I create a whole person out of 20 people's different stories. So I guess you also have that - have to have that - creative mind. But I create one story, I create a dialogue. And you can see all the emotions that were in the people you were interviewing, you know, you get the message without having to go into 20, you know, 100 pages of reading. So counter-stories are powerful, because if you look at all of life, [it] is a story. Everything, when we're listening to the news, we're telling stories; economists, what do they do? They're trying to tell us a story, but they're telling us a story using figures, you know; the archaeologist is trying to tell us a story, piece things together; the sociologist... So for me, how do we tell stories about race in such a way that we unveil, you know, those hidden aspects that are not often seen, you know? And so that's what counter-stories does, you know, it tells you the, the other side, you know.

For example, people say black people are - or immigrants are - taking our jobs. So now that is the dominant narrative, you know, that people say, you know, for example, when we had, you know, the workers who were challenged because of COVID coming in. So, that is the, that was the story: oh they are taking our jobs; what is the counter-story? So you then want to look at- the counter-story is the view of the person at the bottom of the ladder, the people at the bottom of the ladder. When you tell them: you're taking our jobs, what do they do, they come back and tell you the counter-story: actually, no, we're taking the jobs that you - white people - don't want to do- that is the job we're taking. So in other words, we're not taking your job, we're actually keeping the economy going. Because we're doing the jobs that you don't want to do. For example, you know, when people talk about: Africa did not contribute anything to the world, you know, I'm like: ah, duh! you know, let's look at it; let's tell the counter-story, what is the counter-story? The counter-story to that idea that Africa did not contribute anything to the world is actually looking at: that this same Africa, educated, enlightened people actually got together, sat down and decided how to split Africa up and divided [it]. Who tries to fight over something that has no value?

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

You started the 'No To Brain Waste' campaign. Could you tell us a bit about that?

**Dr. Eburn Joseph:**

Yeah, the 'No To Brain Waste' campaign actually started because, you know, I'd published an article about the underemployment of people of migrant descent, particularly black bodies, you know, but also people of, migrants that were underemployed; in fact, they were up to 50 percent more likely to be underemployed the more qualified they were. You know, and so that began to show, and when I put that article there, a lot of people reached out to me to say: 'oh my God, Eburn, that's my story, that's my story, too. I have a level ten, you know; I'm working in a level five job'. I give you one quick story: there's a girl, she has a PhD- she's a qualified doctor, she has a PhD. But with those two qualifications, she is not able to find a job, she's been asked to- because she didn't want to practice as a doctor, she wanted to just go into research or, you know, lecturing, and all of that. She's actually (so that's a level ten qualification with a PhD) the whole of last year, she was working as a care assistant, which required a level five qualification, you know. And so for us, that is that 'brain waste', where people have been taken from their home countries, or people have come here from their home countries (so they are a 'brain drain' for their sending countries) but when they come to

Ireland, and we do not use the expertise and the skills and the knowledge that they have, then while they are here, and they are underemployed, you know, it then means that it is a 'brain waste', you know, here in Ireland.

So that campaign was saying: let's say 'no' to 'brain waste' you know, that overqualified- that people qualified from migrant descent - black, white, green, blue, any colour in between, you know - should not be underemployed. And we were encouraging employers to say that, you know, by our next census, in the next five years, you know, how can we do something to put something in place, that you know, if you have a staff who has a Master's or PhD, who you've employed on a level five, as an employer, you become responsible to make sure you're not contributing to that. You know, we talked about people being complicit by the things we accept, so to move them up, to make sure; so we're actually asking employers to say 'no' to 'brain waste', by, you know, ensuring that they don't under-employ, and that if you have underemployed people, within the next one year, you know, find a position within your organisation that helps to navigate them up. While also asking, you know, in that campaign, we were also asking, you know, we had the 'add one'. We were like, as part of 'No To Brain Waste' we were like: let's keep it simple, you know- just add one. If you have a person of migrant descent or a black person in your organisation; (if you don't have one, then add one). If you have one already, then we're saying, add one more- you know, that's how we can try and begin to break down and challenge ... around you know, the 'brain waste'. Yes, you know, so if we, if we have people who are qualified here, and we're not using their expertise, then it's a 'brain waste'; a 'brain drain' for their sending countries and a 'brain waste' for us in Ireland, because we're not using those expertise.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

I'm curious about what you would want to offer to the predictable questions about asking about Britishness and Irishness in Ireland in 2021. I think partly much of what you've been saying this whole conversation has been offering lenses of asking questions about that already. But are there other things that you'd like to see being present in the public conversation about Britishness and Irishness a centenary after partition?

**Dr. Ebum Joseph:**

Definitely, I think that we should become- for me, I think one of the key things is that we must become cognisant that Ireland is no longer a homogenous society; it will never go back to that place again. Because we have mixed race people. We have black kids who are Irish now. So we have this African-Irish population that is growing and it's not gonna get smaller; it's gonna get bigger. You know, and I think that part of that conversation when we look at Irishness, you know, I think that the biggest challenge is that we have a lot of people - let me not say we have all - but a lot of people have come to the point of equating Irishness with whiteness. And so when you're black, they think you cannot be Irish, you know? So I think that that conversation must be had, you know- about what it really means to be Irish. But that we also begin to recognise the African-Irish population; we begin to recognise, you know, the people who are Irish and who are not white, you know, and to see that change.

I think, for me, is a key part, you know, of that the mixedness of what we have become, you know, we've become this, you know, this amazing mix, you know, and that it's OK. And I think, you know, your mention of Ignatiev's book takes us back to knowing that, you know, our president in the United States - the new president in the United States, you know - has Irish ancestry, you know, and so all of that. And if we can claim people who are outside of the country who have Irish ancestry, it means that in Ireland, we must also begin to be able to claim people who are here with us, who

also have other ancestry and Irish ancestry as well, so that intersectionality of people's lives should be on the table. I think I would love to see that day.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

Dr. Ebum Joseph, thank you so much for coming on The Corrymeela Podcast.

**Dr. Ebum Joseph:**

Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity.

**Our guest this week on The Corrymeela Podcast was Dr. Ebum Joseph. Don't forget to listen right to the end for our "Very Short Story Questions" when Ebum speaks about football, hair and elections.**

**Thanks for listening to The Corrymeela Podcast. I'm Pádraig Ó Tuama and I'll be back with another episode next week.**

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**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

Ebum, could you tell us about a time when your national identity felt important to you?

**Dr. Ebum Joseph:**

It always does every time there is, you know, politics or there is a football game. I think those are the two times: when there's a political election going on, or there is a football match. Those are the two times, when Nigeria is playing or Ireland is playing. I'm like: oh my God, you know, I sit up- national identity is important when there's, you know, who is going to be our new president; Taoiseach for Ireland, and president for Nigeria. It's always important for me, so those two times.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

And could you tell us about a time when you felt foreign?

**Dr. Ebum Joseph:**

I think I feel foreign many times when I'm walking into a room full of all white people. You know, everybody is white- it's a sea of white faces. Even when I'm the speaker and I'm going in to go and speak. I don't feel intimidated, I just feel foreign. You know, like it's- you're just walking into a room and you're constantly the one trying to reach out to people.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

When was a time when you read or saw or heard something, and you thought: that's me, you know- you saw representation?

**Dr. Ebum Joseph:**

I read an article in 2012, it was called 'A Hair Piece: Perspectives on the Intersection of Race and Gender' by Paulette Caldwell. That article made me say: oh, my God, that is so me, because it was about the hair- how important our hair was. And I realised, and I was just saying to a friend, and I - you know, when I'm going for interviews - I put my hair in a particular way, you know, so that you don't appear to them with your afro, and they think: oh, she's uneducated, she can't speak English, and all of those things. So that article, 'A Hair Piece' really just talked about, you know, women's hair, and how it intersects with race and gender.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama:**

And Ebum, has anyone ever said that you were disloyal to your culture or identity?

**Dr. Ebum Joseph:**

Many times! I wrote a book called *Trapped: Prison Without Walls*. And in that book- it was I think, my second book, it was a fiction. But all the stories in it were actually kind of true, you know, I just fictionalised you know, domestic violence between a Nigerian couple living in Ireland, you know. So yes, I kind of painted a bad picture there, you know, but yes, it was, it was that, when I wrote that book, *Trapped: Prison Without Walls*.

*Transcription by FanFán Ltd*