

THIRD WAVE FUND

English Transcript

Mic Check! Podcast

Episode 04: Healing Justice as Cultural Organizing

Guest: Kifu Faruq of the Icarus Project

Total Run Time: 24:56

Original Release Date: July 2019

Speaker 1 (00:00):

Mic check.

Speaker 2 (00:01):

Mic check.

Speaker 3 (00:01):

Mic check.

Speaker 4 (00:02):

Mic check.

Speaker 5 (00:03):

Mic check, mic check, mic check.

Monica Trinidad (00:11):

You're listening to Mic Check!, a podcast from the Third Wave Fund featuring conversations with young women, intersex, queer and trans folks of color.

Tara Tabassi (00:21):

Third Wave has funded youth-led activism and organizing across the United States for over 20 years. And we want to know what's it like to be on the front lines of the fight for gender justice? What about the back lines, the folks who are behind the scenes?

Monica Trinidad (00:35):

And how can listeners and funders best support grassroots movements. We're your hosts, Monica Trinidad.

THIRD WAVE FUND

Tara Tabassi (00:42):

And Tara Tabassi.

Tara Tabassi (00:55):

Hello, listeners. We're bringing you episode four of Mic Check! podcast, a podcast housed by the Third Wave Fund. And today we're discussing all things healing justice. We're not just talking about self-care, but how rest and collective care and community care are actually forms of resistance, as the legendary Cara Page of Kindred Southern Healing Justice Collective has said, "Our movements themselves have to be healing, or there is no point to them."

Monica Trinidad (01:20):

I love that. We're also in a time where we're seeing a trend in funding healing justice work in philanthropy. But despite this trend, we're often not seeing the institutions themselves changing funding practices that are super harmful or reinforcing really fucked up power dynamics. So, we're really excited to be here today to talk through all of these different dynamics and just how healing justice has been around for centuries. We're going to get into that with the wonderful Kifu Faruq of Icarus Project. Icarus Project is a Own Our Power Fund grantee at Third Wave Fund. We're super excited to be here with you today, Kifu. Thank you so much for being with us.

Tara Tabassi (02:01):

To get us started. Who are you and what do you do?

Kifu Faruq (02:04):

I am a Black queer woman who has lived in the South for almost 30 years. So, that certainly makes me Southern. I am a third generation herbalist, and I am a mother and a grandmother and a trickster. I wear a lot of hats. I would say that I am a holder of medicine. I think I'm an herbalist situated within a larger context of our social justice movements. I am someone who comes to convenings to sit with folks and just let them talk about what's going on in their lives, talk about what it means to be a revolutionary, what it means to be someone who's doing prison abolition work, someone who's fighting on the front lines of immigration here in the US within a US context, what it means to be a poor person, what it means to be queer. I also have the pleasure of being the development and partnerships director at the Icarus Project.

Monica Trinidad (03:03):

And Kifu, for our listeners, can you just share a little bit about what is the Icarus Project?

THIRD WAVE FUND

Kifu Faruq (03:09):

The Icarus Project is a support network and education project by and for people who experience the world in ways that are often diagnosed as mental illness. So, what that allows us to do is center mental health and wellness within the context of a healing justice lens. So we do that with workshops; we do that with webinars, and then we also offer rapid response in the areas where we are all located. So we're a collective of women. We are all women of color. We identify as queer and disabled and folks who have a lived experience of living with mental illness. Then we also have this cadre of facilitators all over the US.

Monica Trinidad (03:58):

So what brought you into this work, specifically with the Icarus Project?

Kifu Faruq (04:02):

I was doing work with Southerners on New Ground. We were in the midst of the Mama's Bailout in Durham. I was sitting at a table with the former director of development and partnership and he said, "Kifu, I am transitioning out. We're going to move away from having white folks in leadership. So we're looking for a person of color to do this work. Do you know anybody who does development work?" And I said, "Yes, I do." So we talked about what it would mean to be a Black woman in this organization. I let them know that I love the work that Icarus does in the world, focusing on oppression within the context of mental health, and that I was really excited about being able to talk with folks around what herbal support looked like in managing mental wellness. So that's what brought me.

Tara Tabassi (04:53):

To be in the center question of today's episode, what does healing justice look like and feel like to you, for your people and your communities?

Kifu Faruq (05:02):

For me, it is the glue that binds our resistance work. It's the point of it all. If we are striving for a queer liberation, if we are striving for abolition in our lifetime, if we are striving for land sovereignty for our peoples, for access to healthy food, all of that. This is what it looks like to be under colonialism and imperialism. This is because of capitalism. Our bodies are impacted in these ways, and so we can resist and we should resist. But healing justice means... To me, it's like, but why? It's the why? It's the put the medicine back in. I always say that healing justice to me is putting back together the warrior and the warrior healer.

THIRD WAVE FUND

Monica Trinidad (05:48):

I really appreciate what you were saying around how healing justice is the glue that binds our resistance. I thought that was so beautiful and so accurate. I think when we think of ancestral healing and putting medicine back into our bodies and into our communities, I think oftentimes it's undervalued or underappreciated or not seen as a valuable... It's sort of seen as this accessory or this add-on, not an essential piece of us and our needs. So, I really appreciate what you, and then that quote from Cara Page earlier, of just how it's vital. It's necessary to our work, because I know a lot of us have so much trauma and a lot of us know that a lot of trauma is from capitalism and hetero-patriarchy and from imperialism and colonialism and how critical and important it is for our communities to offer this sort of resource and access outside of the system. It's how we will fully liberate ourselves and fully liberate our communities. So how would you, you and/or Icarus Project, how do you all resource health and healing outside of the system?

Kifu Faruq (07:00):

That is such a perfect question. Thank you so much for asking. I know that how Icarus is doing this, again, situated within the context of Kindred Collective Out of the South and also Healing by Choice, there's lots of folks who are doing this work. So, we imagine ourselves standing shoulder to shoulder with those folks because what we're doing is thinking of healing justice as cultural organizing. What we're trying to do is, yeah, decolonizing what we talked about, decolonizing our mental health system. We know that. So we're educating ourselves and really identifying the impact of oppression on ourselves, on our relationships, the ancestral anxiety and depression that we're carrying via epigenetics. So naming, I think, exactly where it comes from is super key.

Kifu Faruq (07:51):

Then the next question is, so what do we do about it? Again, we are saying we're going to recover ancestral memory and our medicine, is we're trying to tap into what Icarus Project calls protective factors. So one of those protective factors is having a strong cultural identity. The other one is social support. Icarus is really trying to help reduce isolation because what we understand is that trauma happens in relationships, and so healing has to happen in relationships as well.

Kifu Faruq (08:25):

We know another protective factor is nurturing close relationships. We're really trying to push this true narrative, which is what our ancestors did, is that our medicine is situated within the

THIRD WAVE FUND

context of our communities, that it's already here, which brings us a lot of hope. Then, I think, another protective mechanism is having safe access to housing and food and healthcare, whatever that means for folks.

Tara Tabassi (08:51):

There's so much knowledge and wisdom in what you just laid out with those protective factors. I'm like, "Okay. Wait." I have to sit back. I'm like, "Wow." And also, I just really appreciate you giving the framework of this is cultural work because, literally, healing justice and our cultural practices and kitchen medicine, that is literally how we have survived and how we are going to survive and thrive. So, I just really appreciate you, that that's the universe we're working in right now.

Tara Tabassi (09:19):

I hate to do this, to take us on this pivot, but the reality of what we're living in in this country with the current administration, I have a question around that. The pace of organizing under the Trump administration has required so much from already overworked and exhausted migrant communities, Muslim and Black communities, trans communities, women, folks with disabilities and poor folks. So, my question to you is what thoughts do you have on resistance for the long haul?

Kifu Faruq (09:51):

My response is based on the fact that I've had an opportunity to live long. What I know is what my mother has taught me and her mother and all of our mothers before that, is that resistance and revolution is a long game, what the older folks call a long shoe game. So, there's a pacing. I say that within fully understanding that what it feels like now is pants on fire. So, you can lean into pants on fire, or you could not. I think this is a perfect conversation within the context of mental health because...

Kifu Faruq (10:32):

So on my way over here, I'm listening to something on MSNBC. Joy is the anchor person. She was pulling together a panel to talk about the legality of what Trump was doing. I was like, "Oh, yeah." I was experiencing this thing in what I call my stomach mind, like my gut. My stomach mind is alerting me to the fact that there's an expectation that we buy into an alternative reality. This alternative reality, if you suspend belief and go into it, I feel like will take you into places

THIRD WAVE FUND

that are super triggering for me. I try very hard to be in my body, to try not to dissociate, and to try to make sense of what is real and what's not real.

Kifu Faruq (11:23):

I feel like this current administration is just like, of course it's lies on top of lies on top of lies, which have a real impact on our safety and our communities. But it's not true. It's not real. The advice that I give folks is we know what's true. Something is always popping off. So, yes. There is urgency and heightened anxiety and real fear. However, I don't know if I could pinpoint a time in my lifetime when that wasn't already the case. I feel like what Mary Hook says a lot is keeping our shoulder to the plow. We have work to do. Our trauma might be being triggered by Trump, but it's not the origin of it.

Kifu Faruq (12:09):

I also think that it's creating openings, like the particular sort of fissure and breakdown of our political system. It has always been happening. It's just out in the forefront right now. I also tell people to get off of social media. I remember a time when that was an anxiety I didn't have to worry about. So I was like, take a tip from OG, get off the Gram, get off of Facebook. You'll feel better.

Kifu Faruq (12:38):

I think what my great-grandmother knew was it's one day at a time, one week at a time, and also to focus on the health of the community, the health of the family. That is a resistance. So to be on the offense, as opposed to be on the defense. That's what I think.

Monica Trinidad (13:00):

Yeah. Just like you're saying, the shit has been happening for many lifetimes. So, what's happening right now that is making healing just this popular or such a trendy sort of thing right now, and I think it's maybe what you said earlier, it's that people are just so freaking tired and burnt out that they're like, "Oh, wait. You're right. Let's try this thing. Let's figure out how to actually focus on care." But, yeah. We're seeing this huge trend of funding healing justice in philanthropy right now.

Kifu Faruq (13:29):

I think it's a number of things. I think that this is something that has been disproportionately held, always, this emotional, this work has been held by female-bodied folk, trans folk, queer folk.

THIRD WAVE FUND

We've been doing this in our families. We've been doing this in our community. So I feel like something has shifted. It is the dawn of Aquarius. It could be that. So there's a universal shift, and a lifting up. I apologize for the woo, but I am an herbalist. So I got to bring in the woo again. There's a spiritual shift that's happening. Yeah. I want to say that's happening, is that, what do you in the face that I just named of just lies on top of lies? The truth is really the answer to that. So I feel like that's one of the reasons it's just popping off everywhere. So, it's beautiful.

Kifu Faruq (14:22):

Honestly, if folks are talking about it and also wanting to fund it, I try to be very careful and very clear because always there's going to be, within this particular paradigm that we live in the US, this, okay, so this is the new next thing. We've had some convenings; the healers are telling us this is what we need to do, and if we can do this thing, I guess we'll all be healed.

Tara Tabassi (14:49):

We try and have this podcast be an opportunity to give very direct messages to philanthropy from grassroots organizing. So, I guess if there was one message that you had for philanthropy around funding community care, disability justice, and rest as strategic resistance, what would that one message be?

Kifu Faruq (15:15):

What I'd love to say to funders who are funding healing justice, when we talked about healing justice before, we said that healing justice is the why, and why we are doing any of our works with S, with the parentheses around both sides. I feel like those who choose to fund it, that can be the how. What I mean by that is the oppression and the trauma that we're talking about, it's going to take a long time to unearth it and to transform out of what it is now into compost and make it into a new thing, to turn it into something that we can actually grow out of. So that's going to take time. So, I would encourage funders to invest in multi-year granting with organizations that are doing healing justice work.

Kifu Faruq (16:05):

I also want to make clear that there is not one way to do this work. Healing justice is cultural organizing, which is about place, which is about your particular cultural identity. So, I would ask the funders to trust that folks know what their communities need.

Kifu Faruq (16:23):

THIRD WAVE FUND

Then lastly, I would say it's an invitation for funders to glean from folks who they are supporting over the long haul. So this is, again, about being in deep relationship with one another. Those are the things that I would tell funders.

Monica Trinidad (16:38):

Just as healing is cultural work, so is art and visioning and envisioning a new world that we are trying to achieve. In the spirit of that, if we were already all up in our healing, justice was here, our communities were well and abundant, if we won, what would the world look and feel like? And what's your wish for organizing and organizers to get us there? No pressure. Just a small question.

Kifu Faruq (17:11):

Oh, yeah. Hold on a second while I pull the answer...

Monica Trinidad (17:15):

Pull out the book of answers.

Kifu Faruq (17:18):

Multiple answers.

Tara Tabassi (17:19):

Right? This is like the sci-fi moment.

Monica Trinidad (17:21):

Yeah.

Kifu Faruq (17:24):

Right. I think that certainly what has helped me lean into the future is the practice of Afrofuturism. Sci-fi definitely gives us that opportunity to imagine what it would look like. I imagine that we all have access to really good and nutritive food, and that folks have shelter. I know that we will not have to exchange work for food and work for sleep and work for the things that we need to survive, that we won't have prisons, that we will be self-governing, that there will be a place for the differences that we all have amongst us. We'll be celebrated. That scarcity isn't at the center of so much of what our people are dealing with now, that herbs will be flowing in the streets and reiki is readily available, and that we'll be dancing and that we'll be

THIRD WAVE FUND

singing, that there's enough. The truth is that there is actually enough and, yeah, be clear about what it is you want, I think. Know that. Be sure. And then you're going to have to be the thing in order for us to push the rest of this away.

Tara Tabassi (18:41):

Yeah. I know. I just am like, "Hey, whoa!" Thank you.

Kifu Faruq (18:45):

That's real, though.

Tara Tabassi (18:46):

Yeah. Thank you for... I just appreciate you giving of your vision there because I think that is the light that shines the way forward. Also, I want to thank you. So we want to thank you so much for giving of your time and your spirit to come onto this podcast today. I guess just like we're coming to a close here altogether. So, do you have any last thoughts on healing justice as we're closing out, and also as a fellow plant lover, if you were a plant or herb, what would you be, Kifu?

Kifu Faruq (19:21):

Last words around healing justice: Find out what it means. If you can hear this podcast, find out what it means and infuse it into your movement work. If you can fund it, fund it. If I were a plant, on my back I have, and down my left arm, I have a tattoo of Spanish lavender. So, I would definitely say that lavender is my plant familiar. She is the plant that's always got my back or at my back. I think lavender gets this rap for being this aromatic sweet thing, makes sure you go to sleep, which is no small thing. Sleep is important.

Kifu Faruq (20:06):

However, lavender is also an analgesic. So it's a pain reducer. It is intensely antimicrobial, and also the oils in the lavender act as a good way to move your bowels. I feel like, again, if I'm imagining a world as a world where we're all regular, I think that's important to our movements.

Monica Trinidad (20:36):

I love it!

Kifu Faruq (20:37):

THIRD WAVE FUND

All of our movements.

Tara Tabassi (20:41):

[inaudible 00:20:41] regular.

Kifu Faruq (20:42):

It's also gayly purple. So, I love lavender in that way. Also, the Spanish lavender, the flower is very orchid and vulvular-looking. So it's a very queer, lesbionic kind of plant.

Monica Trinidad (20:59):

Oh, my god. You know it's a good podcast when you start talking about poop. It's like a good luck sign.

Tara Tabassi (21:04):

Right? It's not a full conversation without talking about the poop.

Kifu Faruq (21:08):

That's right. One of the things that I started bringing into convening space is, hopefully folks who hear this podcast will have tasted some of my revolutionary tea. So the revolutionary tea has lavender, chamomile, skullcap, stinging nettles, echinacea, marshmallow root, and all the things that you would need to speak and go deep in your work and be vulnerable and also have lots of energy and not lean so heavily on sodas and coffee.

Monica Trinidad (21:40):

That's beautiful.

Tara Tabassi (21:41):

All right. Okay. Okay. Okay. Monica, it's your turn. If you were a plant.

Monica Trinidad (21:46):

Okay. If I was a plant or a herb... I say herb. Is there a difference?

Tara Tabassi (21:52):

Okay. sorry.

THIRD WAVE FUND

Monica Trinidad (21:52):

No, it's...

Tara Tabassi (21:52):

No. It might just be my European...

Monica Trinidad (21:53):

So I originally was thyme, but I think today I'm feeling the eucalyptus. I think eucalyptus is super trustworthy, and I can always depend on it when I need to clear my nostrils and decongest just have it in the shower with me. I know that it'll help me just clear and cut through the air. So, it's super dependable. I would say that I'm dependable and trustworthy, too. You can count on me to clear your nostrils. Okay. What about you, Tara? Who would you be?

Tara Tabassi (22:30):

Not to be such a stereotypical Iranian, but I really am feeling rose right now because rose... What more of a goddess smell is there? I think rose is there for you on the self-love days when you just really need some heart, some heart healing, and is there for the sad days, is there for the sexy days. I think I like to just put it in every possible way, inside and on top of my body, and swim in the healings of rose. So, yeah. Shout out to rose today.

Kifu Faruq (23:11):

That's beautiful.

Monica Trinidad (23:12):

Yes.

Tara Tabassi (23:13):

It has been a beautiful time together.

Kifu Faruq (23:16):

Yes.

Monica Trinidad (23:17):

THIRD WAVE FUND

Thank you so, so much, Kifu. It was an honor to be in conversation with you. I look forward to everybody hearing your wisdom and thoughts on healing justice and the powerful and critical work of the Icarus Project. So, thank you so much.

Kifu Faruq (23:35):

Thank you for having me. I'm excited that folks are turned up for healing justice. Yeah. I'm honored to be able to contribute to that conversation. Yeah. Thank you so much for having me.

Tara Tabassi (23:54):

Third Wave Fund is a feminist activist fund led by and for young women of color, intersex, queer, and trans folks of color and low-income youth under 35 years old. We work towards a vision of philanthropic justice in which those who have the least economic and political power have the most access to philanthropy.

Monica Trinidad (24:13):

Thanks so much to Kifu Faruq at the Icarus Project, our producer, Ari Mejia, DJ Tikka Masala, Ana Conner, Kiyomi Fujikawa, Nicole Myles, Joy Messenger, mai doan, Maryse Mitchell-Brody, and many more for making this podcast episode happen. Stay tuned for our next episode and be sure to subscribe to our podcast on SoundCloud and Apple podcasts. Follow Third Wave Fund on Twitter @3wave, on Instagram @3wavefund, and on Facebook. You can follow Icarus Project at theicarusproject.net, on Twitter @Madgifts, and on Facebook and Instagram @TheIcarusProject. You can also sign up for our monthly newsletter on our website at thirdwavefund.org.

Tara Tabassi (24:52):

Thanks for listening.