

The Mic Drop - Season One, Episode Four: Manono

Adrian [00:00:00] Hello, everyone. We are here again on the Mic Drop of Many Hands One Heart. And here we have one of my beloved friends, Manono! Hello, darling. How are you doing?

Manono [00:00:13] Oh, I'm doing great, dear. My name is Manono and I live here in Liverpool.

Adrian [00:00:23] Cool. Alright Manono, tell us a little bit about you. How long you been here in the UK?

Manono [00:00:30] I've been here in the UK 16 years now.

Adrian [00:00:34] Wow. Sixteen years. That's a long journey here.

Manono [00:00:38] It is a long journey.

Adrian [00:00:40] Yes, yes and how you feel about nowadays.

Manono [00:00:45] Amused. It's like home, really it's like home, really, it's amused, really amused food amused of everything that is in Liverpool. Yeah. I take it I take Liverpool as home.

Adrian [00:00:58] Yeah. Yeah. Liverpool.

Manono [00:01:00] I take Liverpool as home.

Adrian [00:01:00] Yeah it's a really warming place for migrants.

Manono [00:01:02] I get along with people, people are so nice, everything really in Liverpool.

Adrian [00:01:08] Yes. So Manono you've been one of the senior members of Many Hands One Heart, so basically you've been here for the whole story of the group. Tell us a little bit. How was the group at the beginning? And how it helps the group through your personal experience.

Manono [00:01:27] The group it supports LGBTQI.

Adrian [00:01:31] Cool. Yeah.

Manono [00:01:34] And since I've known the group, it made me feel confidence. It has made me knowing that I'm not alone. A lot of people that I met, they have similar stories as mine. So really, it made me feel like I'm a human being.

Adrian [00:01:54] Good. I'm glad you bring that because there's something interesting that we shall acknowledge that asylum seekers and refugees, they are not only because they live in a sort of war or something like that, there's also people who came here because for your sexuality, you're not safe in your country. What's the situation with the LGBT in your country?

Manono [00:02:19] I'll talk about I myself at first.

Adrian [00:02:22] Good.

Manono [00:02:23] Coming from a Christian, very Christian family. And the country that I'm coming from is a very Christian country. And so in terms of sexuality, we only know about the one. The other one we don't class it as normal. There is names that we call the other one.

Adrian [00:02:50] Yeah. Okay.

Manono [00:02:51] Which I myself am one of them.

Adrian [00:02:54] Okay. Yeah. So you're you're from the other ones. So yeah. How do you know you were from that.

Manono [00:03:01] I knew since I was in the kindergarten.

Adrian [00:03:06] Okay.

Manono [00:03:07] Yeah. That I'm different. Yes. Yeah.

Adrian [00:03:11] Yeah. School. So how was that process to acceptance in yourself. It was difficult or you felt...

Manono [00:03:20] It was really hard for me to really know what was going on with me because you couldn't talk about it. And the name, gay phrase, we didn't use it by then. So really, I myself always been confused. Am I disabled or am I an animal? The way they call them and I'll be listening to that.

Adrian [00:03:52] If you're sick even.

Manono [00:03:53] Sick, is it a disease? Yeah. So I couldn't talk about it, or I couldn't show myself because I was scared of the way they were treating them when I was young and I knew myself that I'm like them, but I wouldn't talk. I could not even do it. I could not even show them because I didn't want to be called all those names that we were calling them.

Adrian [00:04:19] Yeah. So basically, since you were children, you were told that you were sick, you were disease, you were something that is wrong? OK. OK. How's the legal situation of the LGBT in your country?

Manono [00:04:36] Really, as I said I'm coming from a Christian family and also my country is a very Christian country, with LGBT really it's something that they don't want to hear about it, they don't want people to talk about it. If you talk about it, they'll kill you, it'll end you, they'll kill you, really they will, just people that just don't want to see you.

Adrian [00:05:05] So it's like my country when it's not illegal. But is still persecuted.

Manono [00:05:10] Yeah. Now, for what I know, they say like it's not illegal in the media, whatever.

Adrian [00:05:18] Yeah, of course but that's just in words.

Manono [00:05:19] But really til now it's illegal.

Adrian [00:05:24] Yeah. Yeah. I think we could agree, we came from that background when a country is publicly not illegal, but in the sense of the base of the society, the homophobic is something that is acceptable even in my country, for example, if you killed someone who is gay or if you insult or attack someone who is gay, the person who's responsible for that is the gay people because they were looking for that. Is that the same that in your country, that LGBT people is responsible for the attacks they suffer because they are against the rules?

Manono [00:06:05] That's true. That's the same thing in my country as well.

Adrian [00:06:08] Yeah because they are attacking the moral of the society. Yeah. Yeah. OK. So when you came to the UK, you were a different person and you have different feelings in regards of your sexuality? Yes? Yes. OK. So how has been that journey to discover yourself as a lesbian woman?

Manono [00:06:33] When I came here, I was really pretending to be straight. I tried myself to fit in, pretending to be straight, but I knew really I knew that I wasn't straight. Coming to this country really it was a getaway for me, I was really happy that I'm in this country that I can be do whatever I want to do. Free. But when I came to this country because of the brainwash that they brainwashed me back home it was really hard for me to come out even though I was in this country because I didn't want like to hear those names like to be judged, all I want is like accept me. So because of the way I was and some people when they were telling me the stories that, look, even I'm here, but I feel the same. I feel the same like I'm in Africa. I mean, really, I'm still in the closet. So that made me as well to be still in the closet. So the time that I was thinking myself that no, for how long I'm gonna live like this. I went on Google and I find out that there is some groups that they give counselling and that's before I came out. So I went for those groups. I went and tell them about myself and these groups, they were happy to see me and they told me stories and they showed me that no, no, no, you are not alone, there is people like you. They are going through counselling. But what made me, the thing that I was struggling a lot was to accept myself. I was really struggling to do that because I was really confused. Am I normal or abnormal? So when I went to these groups and having counselling is when the time that I have to accept myself by seeing the others they left, that they are living and they are happy but me because it's like I'm suppressing my sexuality. So I was going through a lot. But since these groups when I was going for counselling before I came out then they build up my confidence. Then I came out. I said, no, I'm OK. This is me now. This is me now. So I can do it freely the way I want. And since that happened, really, I feel free. I feel normal. I do my things the way I want to do it.

Adrian [00:08:55] Yeah. So basically, you never came out in your country for all the beliefs you even you were scared and struggling with yourself because you don't know who you are really. Anyway, when you came here to England with all the freedom we have here, with all the stuff we have here. You're still struggling to accept yourself because you still do not have clear who you are. Or even if that's a scene or any because you still have that thought.

Manono [00:09:24] I have. I still have it, to tell you the truth, the way I've seen it, even the professionals, they are making me to be fear of my sexuality for not knowing myself, who

am I? Because of the professionals, the way they're be dealing with people from Africa. Or I can say people from outside England the way they are. They don't believe them. So it made me feel like, oh, so it's true that this is not exist or my sexuality is untrue. Yeah.

Adrian [00:10:00] I think it's important that what you say because you seek for assistance. Yes, but it's important to recall that you seek for assistance not because you want to cure yourself, but you seek for that because you want to know what's going on with you. You were confused. You were off focus, so you want to keep all your thoughts in order. So then, there you discover that you were lesbian. Yes. And I think that's really, really precious because sometimes people tend to blame people on the closet when they don't know their backgrounds. Yes. You know, be I've been on my myself on the closet. But I came out really, young. I mean, not that young, but I it was like 19 I think so when I came out still young I think so and since I came out of the closet I tried to build myself my own story, my own ideas. But in your case, you even having the freedom, you don't feel that encouragement to build your own story. Yes. Because you were poisoned with that feelings. Yes. So, it's 2020 Manono, how is this year in terms of the sexuality?

Manono [00:11:27] Really, when it comes to my sexuality, I've tried to put it there so that anyone can know that I'm a lesbian. But in terms of enjoying my sexuality, there is a lot that is blocking it. Yeah. There is a lot that I'm going through. There is a lot that really I'm trying to see myself that it is really hard that I can enjoy the way I want. So most of the time I'm not doing it. I'm not out there to socialise a lot because there is a lot financial, it's blocking me that I can, because if I'm in love with someone, really I want to enjoy, the way that other people are doing it. I want to send exchange gifts, I want to go out, but there is no nothing that there is nothing that I have that I can make the other person. And also with the status that I have, because I've got no papers yet, it's hard to find a relationship because some people, they want to know if you are allowed to be in this country. So if you're telling them 'oh I'm asylum seeker' or 'I'm a failed asylum seeker', they'll leave you because they'll see that you're going to waste their time.

Adrian [00:12:45] Yes. Thanks for carrying on that. Yeah. I've been that in in that situation when you think when you have no status, you're you're no one here basically, you feel you feel you're no one. Even if you had a big supportive network in the reality, you don't know if tomorrow you will be here. You don't have anything for granted. And I was telling in my interview that I'm 28 and I never had in my life I never received in my life roses or chocolates, from a guy, I never been able to go out and have a date. I never been able to hold hands outside in the streets. And I'm 28 and still feeling I cannot do that for my current situation as asylum seeker. And I think you are on the same position?

Manono [00:13:45] I am on the same position because to tell you the truth, Adrian I used to be in a relationship. Yeah, but this relationship it's the professionals who ended up my relationship because they had to discriminate my girlfriend that you are not a lesbian, yet I'm seeing the person. And now my girlfriend, she is going through mental health problems because she's like, what do I really need to do to show them that I'm a lesbian?

Adrian [00:14:16] Yes, that that's a really delicate...

Manono [00:14:18] And this this happened in this country.

Adrian [00:14:20] I know that's delicate because, you and I, we do activism on LGBT asylum seekers circle and we hear stories that you say, is that even possible to be true? I mean, it's unbelievable how sometimes, like you said, how can I prove I, I am LGBT, how

can I prove something else? And it's difficult sometimes because even bringing in some evidence, the Home Office don't believe you just don't believe you. So it's horrible when you don't have a certain evidence that is that that evidence will be taken like a fact or, you know, signed off. I mean, yeah, I'm not sure if we can say this, I'm not sure if we can say this...

Manono [00:15:09] Say it, say it because but we are raising awareness through the podcast and we need to talk what is like what we are going through. Because what, what I went through for me now not talking to my girlfriend, she left me, she and the left that she left is like, oh, I don't know what I can prove to people that I'm a lesbian. So because of whatever is happening in this country, it has made me to fear more of my sexuality. I'm struggling. I don't even know what to do now, because if in Africa, I left Africa just because of that, knowing that I'm coming to the country, that they are accepting LGBTQ and I'm coming here and it's the same thing, I just don't know whether it's because of my colour, I don't know whether it's because I'm coming from Africa. I don't know what how I can do it for them to believe me and to tell you the truth, sometimes when I was sitting down and thinking, oh, I don't blame people in Africa. I don't blame people in Africa, why they don't accept LGBTQI, I don't believe them, I don't blame them at all. Because when I come when I was growing up in Africa, I used to go to church and I grew up in a family that they believe in God. And when I was growing up, I started to know that, oh, this is Church of England. That's Church of England. All those church of, so many churches they are Church of England and those churches, they teach us too, but they teach us Bible. And they were even giving us Bibles for free. And when you read when you go through the Bible, our sexuality is not there. It's abomination. It's they said Sodom and Gomorrah. And in Africa, they're believing that you understand. They are believing that. Yet I come to this country when I come to this country, continue going to church in this country. It's when I learnt that this country accepts LGBTQ, which I'm one of them. And also they accept to marry them in church, which cannot happen in my country, which cannot happen in my country. So if I'm taking my girlfriend, this is my girlfriend. And they are telling, 'oh, no, you can just bring if you take a friend from outside and you bring me and you said this is your girlfriend'. Really? How can you feel. Yet you've run away from that country which they'll criticise you. Discriminate on you. And you're coming here. These are the professionals. These are the professionals that they are telling you 'e don't believe you.' How can you feel?

Adrian [00:17:42] I totally get your point. And I don't want to get introduced. And there are a few things because I'm not a believer. And honestly I don't have any respect for the churches, I as institutions, I respect if you believe, but I don't respect their institutions. For all the damage they do to the LGBT people. And I mean, for me, religions, I know this is not the place to talk about that. But for me, religious is just a business and especially in Africa. When you see these massive events, when they are, they do 'miracle' it says and people buy that, because they need to believe something. And when they fall in that stuff, it's more easy to control their minds. And it's just unbelievable how they control their minds, not only for the economical reasons, but to thought the moral they want. So as a Christians, as you are Christian here in England, how do you feel about yours you as a lesbian woman and your beliefs?

Manono [00:19:00] Me as a Christian, I'm really happy to be a Christian because this is something that I was born with. This is something that is in my blood. Yeah. Coming here, I continue with my Christianity, but not my sexuality that I've even tell my own people in the church, because I know that they have that Christianity mentality, that they won't accept me because sometimes I'll be sitting in the church and they'll be all 'oh there is no gay

marriage no this and that' and they will be talking a lot but I know my myself that, ok, say it, but that's not the way I am, me I'm a gay person. You understand? OK. So for that one, really, I don't count. But what I'm counting is to accept me the way I am. Just accepted me. That would make me more happy if you would accept me that I'm a lesbian. So if I'm asking for protection in this country, definitely if they are protecting me, that means my church will understand. But if they are not accepting me, if they are not protecting me, how can my church going to understand that?

Adrian [00:20:14] Right. That's interesting, I'm not sure if you are if you are happy to share which church, are you going?

Manono [00:20:24] To tell you the truth, really, I cannot share my church where I go to. Yeah, it's this sort is got, I'm sure it's got nothing to do with my church. This is something to do with my sexuality.

Adrian [00:20:38] No, I'm bringing this because, doing activism I've been invited to many LGBT Christian groups. And I always say no because I say, honestly, I'm not going to see any helping myself going there because I'm not, I believer but there's people that, you know, Sam, for example, he found a lovely community on a church, in an open LGBT table on St Brides Church. And he's a Christian. Yeah. And. I'm not sure if you're happy to discuss this...

Manono [00:21:16] No, this church, it helps is for LGBT people also. Yeah, it is. This no, not mine. The one that I go. But this is the one that member one more member of us that I know. Oh, yeah. Because a lot of members, they go there. It's a church that they help a lot. Mm hmm. Indeed they do understand about what we're going through as migrants in this country. Yes. Yes. Mostly asylum seekers and they take part. So the church that I'm talking about, it's far, far away to do with that.

Adrian [00:21:45] Yeah. But what I'm trying to to bring is, are you more Christian of a church or are you more Christian of the whole beliefs?

Manono [00:21:57] I'm a Christian and I believe as well. I do believe and I'm a Christian that I do believe. So when it comes to my sexuality, I don't mix into that. This is something if it's God is there and he created me and you, I don't think that he can just forsake me just because of my sexuality? I don't think so. So this Christianity, it's me. And I believe a lot about it. This is what I learnt from the people that they came and open churches in my country. And now coming here. I came here when I came here, I came here to study and when I came here to study, this is when I find out oh I can be happy and live my life the way I want as we are a free country. This is what I was doing. But even though I was doing it, I was still in the closet not showing the public, but I knew now are coming to know, it was in my twenties when I came here. So I know now for how long am I going to hide this? For how long am I going to still be in the closet. So let me come out. When I came out, I went for counselling and that counselling, they show me that no, no, no, accept yourself first. So I accepted myself because it was hard, if I accepted, if I go home, they'll kill me. They're going to kill me. Yes. They're going to harm me. They're going to imprison punishment by in prison for 14 years in prison. So I was trying my best to hide it, but I saw that oh, no I don't need to go there I need to stay here where I know that I can practise it the way I want.

Adrian [00:23:37] Yeah. Okay. So you're saying that works for you is to separate your sexuality from your beliefs. You feel okay with that?

Manono [00:23:46] I do feel okay with that you know, I manage...

Adrian [00:23:49] That's what's you make you cope with your...

Manono [00:23:51] Yes.

Adrian [00:23:52] Okay. That's, it's interesting because it's another point of view that I never thought it in my personal experience I always try to mix everything because I think for me as a person, I should have everything in symphony. But like you say, if you're able to separate your religion from your sexuality, I think it's okay. And it's a valid point of carry on things because there's a point of meeting of both sides when you don't discriminate other LGBT people, because you're also LGBT people that helped you do don't mix stuffs. And it's really interesting to carry on with that. And so, yeah, to finish, instead of asking you what you see yourself in the future, I want you to prefer to make a wish. And share your wish with us and dream of all that and feel free.

Manono [00:24:54] My dream really it's living normal life in the future. Having my own girlfriend, I will marry, having kids. This how I look at myself in the future. Knowing that I'm not growing young, I'm growing old I came here when I was really young, but really I can see that it will happen one day.

Adrian [00:25:17] Yeah. So that wish they will be true. Sooner or later that will be true.

Manono [00:25:23] It will, I know that it will happen.

Adrian [00:25:26] Alright. Yes. Thank you so much ladies and gentlemen!

Manono [00:25:28] Thank you very much.

Adrian [00:25:31] Thank you so much Joyce, again for being with us. And we'll see you next time.