

ON THE CONCEPT OF GRASSROOTS REPARATIONS

AMT IN CONVERSATION WITH HIP HOP PEÑA, CALI, JAN 2023

Thoughts noted down during and after a conversation between the Anne Matthews Trust and Hip Hop Peña, a hip-hop education organisation based in Cali, Colombia.

These notes are still a WORK IN PROGRESS because we hope that these reflections will continue to evolve and inform our International stream of work at the AMT, and can be shared with other like-minded organisations who can benefit from the research and process that we are on.



Meeting between AMT & Hip Hop Pena, January 2023

What is the difference between philanthropy and reparations?

Philanthropy is based on the Capitalist / neoliberal concept of the 'trickle down effect,' whereby competition, growth and maximal profit is encouraged, in order for those who can to generate income, and then disperse to those who are in need. This model may have good intentions, but it feeds an ingrained dynamic of who has power and who doesn't.

Reparations is about repairing; the relationships, the land, the living beings, the landscapes, that have been impacted by generations of injustice, colonialism, extraction, exploitation, appropriation and genocide that has been enacted by the nations that we now call the Global North, on the people, plants, animals and the environment of the lands we now call the Global South.

Often reparations is something discussed in reference to financial compensation, usually at the level of the Nation State, eg. Nations who profited from slavery at the expense of other nations paying back a sum of money to compensate for the damage caused. But we aren't in a position to wait for this, and nor do we trust the nation states of the global north to have this on their agenda.

In the global north there is a crisis of hope, there are resources but people are atomised, they don't know what to do, they feel impotent and powerless. In the global south there is so much to do, the social movements are stronger and the crisis is evident, but there are no resources. But things are changing, Hip Hop Pena were surprised to have these conversations with people from the global north. How can we build a global anti colonial movement from the grassroots that isn't taken over by institutions? With these moments, building trust and understanding and realising that behind closed doors in many small groups we are all having similar conversations.

Here are some reflections about Grassroots Reparations, noted down during our conversation with Hip Hop Pena, at the end of our two weeks together in Colombia. It is with these principles and understandings that we wish to undertake work locally and internationally at the Anne Matthews Trust:

1. It is about two directions, exchange. Not magnanimous giving, nor taking without consent or recognition, but always acting on the principle of reciprocity, and acknowledging explicitly what is being received as well as given.
2. Besides money, the exchange might be of learning, of languages, of tactics, of stories, or crucially, we found, of hope.
3. Reparations is not looking for relief from guilt, or for recognition or for heroic public acts. It might be quiet and behind the scenes because it is about justice, not about ego.
4. It is about relearning that we are humans, and everything that being human entails, emotions, imperfections, mistakes, limitations, love, fear, anger, sadness, and the essential need for relationship and enjoyment of life.
5. It is about having a wider understanding of the debts being repaid, they are not just financial; they are cultural, spiritual, intergenerational, energetic
6. It is about having a 'radical' agenda: in the traditional meaning of the word 'from the roots,' so finding deep, systemic level solutions rather than temporary or tokenistic acts. Also radical in the sense that acting with a reparations agenda is to act in a way that does not recreate systems of oppression. It has to be critical and actively decolonial, dismantling the power dynamics of colonialism, rather than inadvertently recreating them. We want our reparative action to be anti-capitalist, anti-imperial, anti-racist, anti-patriarchal, and in support of our fellow living beings both in the human and more than human world.
7. It is about acknowledging historic violence and its contemporary impacts. Understanding that the people in the room right now may not have been directly involved, but that the benefits for some from colonialism, and the detrimental effects are still massively impactful today.
8. It is about not trying to do things the way we would in the global north. Learning that our core beliefs; for example about time, economics, science, or justice, may not be fundamental everywhere.
9. It is about trusting local knowledge and decision making. We can offer to share our ideas, but not think that our local ways will be automatically applicable in other contexts. We can offer to share money, but not assume that we know best how it should be spent.

10. It is about building relationships based on equity; not patronism or so-called 'equality' which doesn't take into account all starting from different starting points.
11. It will require different understandings of economics. Spending time and money on healing soil, healing relationships doesn't have a financial profit, but we have to reprioritise according to our own agenda.
12. It takes '*conscientisation*', the act of critically reflecting and educating ourselves and each other from our lived experiences, rather than from received or mainstream ways of thinking. Deconstructing the dreams that capitalism has sold us.
13. It has to be concerned with healing outside of the human experience - with the land, the rivers, the flora and fauna, fixing the soil; repairing more than human relationships after 500 years of exploitation.
14. It requires building long-term relationships. Working together to build trust and understanding across geographies, identities, languages, differences in age, class, race and experience. Meeting each other gives us hope, and hope is our power.