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MBS ([00:01](#)):

Justin Trudeau is a second Trudeau to be an influential Canadian politician. His father, Pierre Elliott Trudeau was also the prime minister. But before he became Prime Minister, in fact, as justice minister, Pierre Elliott famously said, "there's no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation." Well, sure. But sometimes in a podcast, you've just got to talk about sex.

MBS ([00:30](#)):

Welcome to 2 Pages with MBS. This is the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them, a book that has shaped them. Minna Salami is the author of sanctuary knowledge, a Black feminist approach for everyone. If you're a fan of the podcast, that title might ring a bell because Monica Jang read two pages from that book in one of the very first episodes. In fact, it was those two pages that made me reach out



to Minna to invite her to be part of this. But how can black feminism be an approach for everyone?

Minna ([01:08](#)):

Black feminists have been building a body of work that speaks to the interconnectedness of oppression and also the interconnectedness of liberation. Black feminist thought has from its very beginning, it moved away from feminism at large or Black liberation at large, particularly to hone in on to the many different factors of social oppression that impact people's lives.

MBS ([01:40](#)):

In the last two years, the three P's, pandemics and protests and politics have made the currents of power and oppression not only more apparent, but more every day. I mean, this now touches us all.

Minna ([01:53](#)):

The world has kind of woken up to the interconnectedness of oppression in a big way. We came to realize that we need to treat essential workers better, that people's lives depend on them and that those relationships are reciprocal. In essence, we came to understand class as something that is really important to look at. We saw how different groups have been affected by the pandemic in really significantly different ways. People of color, people in the global south have faced more negative impacts. The pandemic has also been gendered. More men have been impacted by it. And so in a sense, we've all been engaging with the kinds of questions that Black feminists have been engaging with for decades.

MBS ([02:50](#)):

But if the pandemic has made these issues more visible and more urgent, I still don't really know what to do about it. Doesn't Black feminism narrow the conversation rather than broaden it?



Minna ([03:02](#)):

The point is to not reinvent the wheel. It isn't to say that Black feminist thought has all the answers or can claim ownership of all this, but it has been looking at questions that are relevant and at the forefront of civic discussion for so long. It really has a lot to offer in terms of how we speak about interconnectedness, in terms of how we speak about social change on both an individual and a collective level.

MBS ([03:33](#)):

Okay. But how does this all tie into talking about sex? Well, I'll let Minna introduce the book she'd going to read from.

Minna ([03:41](#)):

I've picked up a book called *The Sex Lives of African Women* by Nana Darkoa Sekyiamah, a Ghanaian author.

MBS ([03:54](#)):

How did you come across this book? How did it come into your life?

Minna ([03:57](#)):

So the author, Nana, is a friend of mine. She's first a colleague, I should say. Nana has been writing a blog called, *Adventures From the Bedrooms of African Women* since 2010, I believe. It might be 2009. That is the same year that I launched my blog, *Ms. Afropolitan*, which eventually became my book, you could argue. I would say that this book that I've chosen is a continuation of Nana's blog. The book means so much to me because we both were blogging in a time where blogs at large were still quite a rare thing, that African feminist blogs were especially a rare thing. It's been wonderful to be part of her journey and vice versa. I've been really excited about this book and it lives up to all of the expectations.



MBS ([05:01](#)):

Is it actually out in the world? I poked around looking for it and it didn't appear yet to have been published, but maybe I was just looking at the wrong things.

Minna ([05:10](#)):

Yeah. You know what, I have an advanced copy and so this is actually a bit unfair. It dawned on me after that you wouldn't be able to look at the book before recording.

MBS ([05:22](#)):

It's great. Part of what I love doing about these conversations is I'll often know the book and have done a bit of research about it, but I won't know the two pages. Part of what I love being is being present to reading pages I haven't read before, or haven't read for a while. I have to be very, very present and very interested so that I can have a good conversation with you afterwards. But I think this is our first time reading from a book yet to be published. You're just racking up the first, Minna, it's amazing.

Minna ([05:51](#)):

I am. Maybe by the time this comes out, it will be published because I think it's coming out in two or three weeks.

MBS ([05:58](#)):

Oh, perfect. It probably it will be out. It's still literally, certainly metaphorically hot off the press. I love the story. Just the idea of the two of you being beacons of African feminist blogging. It's me and it's her. There's not much else out there.

Minna ([06:15](#)):

Yeah. There were maybe a dozen of us or so, but many have left the blogging scene. I say that Nana and I are probably the ones who persisted. Yes. So that is a lovely story.



MBS ([06:31](#)):

How did you pick the two pages to read?

Minna ([06:34](#)):

The way that her book is structured, she has spent how many years is it, six years interviewing women of African heritage all around the world about their sex lives, basically. The book consists of three sections in which each of these interviews are conveyed by Nana, the author. At first I thought that I would read one of them, but actually I don't think that that is the best thing to do because it would just give like one very small section of the book. What I've decided is that I'll read Nana's prologue because that really speaks to the books essence. Let me know when you want me to start.

MBS ([07:26](#)):

I think we're ready. I think we should jump in and hear these two pages. I'm thoroughly intrigued. Minna, over to you,

Minna ([07:33](#)):

For over 10 years, I have shared my personal experiences of sex through adventures from the bedrooms of African woman. A blog I co-founded with my friend Malacca Grant. I have also facilitated conversations about women's experiences of sex and pleasure in a variety of public settings, ranging from intimate living room conversations in Mombasa, Kenya, to public events in Berlin, Germany. I have often spoken and written about the importance of owning one's body and my continuing journey and negotiating my sexuality and desires both within and outside the bedroom. Speaking in public about a subject which is often deemed taboo, especially in the part of the world where I originate as a political act, I think and write about sex in order to learn how to have better sex. I encourage other women to share their experiences of sex in order to build our collective consciousness around the politics of pleasure.



Minna ([08:40](#)):

This is critical in a world where women too often lack access to truly comprehensive sexuality education. Black, African, and Afro-descendant women are often told the text should only be within particular constraints, between people of opposite genders, for instance, and within certain parameters. In some countries, those parameters are marriage. In other countries, the law prohibits some types of sexual acts or tries to control the choices girls and women have when they experience an unwanted pregnancy. In the sex Lives of African Women, individual women from across the African continent and its global diaspora speak to their experiences of sex, sexualities and relationships. These stories are based on in-depth interviews I conducted between 2014 and 2020, with women from 31 countries, a significant proportion of the women I interviewed represented more than one nation and have their sexual experiences shaped by the various countries and cultures they had experienced.

Minna ([09:51](#)):

After speaking to over 30 women for this book, I started to see several common threads weaving through their stories. We're all on a journey to what sexual freedom and agency. In order to get there, we need to heal. Healing looks different for everybody. For some, healing came about through celibacy and spiritual growth. For others, healing came through taking back power as a dominatrix and sex worker. Many of the women I spoke to inspired me with the realities of how they live their best sexual lives. This included deeply personal stories like navigating freedom and polyamory in conservative Senegal, or resisting the erasure of lesbian identity and finding queer community in Egypt in the midst of revolution. African women grappled with the trauma of sexual abuse and resist religious and patriarchal edicts in order to assert their sexual power and agency. They do this by questioning and resisting societal norms whilst creating norms and narratives that allow them to be who they truly are.



The journey toward sexual freedom is not a linear one or one that is fixed and static. Freedom is a state that we are constantly seeking to arrive at.

MBS ([11:20](#)):

That's a wonderful finishing sentence around we're constantly seeking to arrive at that place of freedom. Minna what was it in those that prologue that speaks so powerfully to you?

Minna ([11:32](#)):

Well, the prologue really speaks to the many journeys that this book takes the reader on. It's really amazing when you read the stories of, I think it's about 30 or so women, and they're just all so different. You have women who, as she says in the prologue, there's this polyamorous woman. There's also a woman living in a polygamous marriage. There's a disabled woman. There's a woman who's a sex worker and there's all different types of sexualities and religions represented. But there's really a thread that goes through this journey, which is the search for freedom and for healing. The prologue I think conveys very well, the sense of, what's the word I'm looking for, there's a kind of intimacy when you're reading this. Obviously it's a book about sex, so there is the sexual intimacy, but there's also a vulnerability and a sense that the women that Nana has interviewed are really willing to share from their inner most selves so that other women can have companions in a world where women's sexuality is also compromised by patriarchy.

Minna ([13:03](#)):

I also think that the prologue does a good job of conveying that this is a book that is in many ways, it is a story about Blackness as well. Each of the women are of African descent, but some live in the UK, some in Germany, some in Haiti, Jamaica, Egypt, South Africa, there's just a really rich scope of travel and international, my blog is called Ms. Afropolitan, so that word Afropolitan, it stands out to describing this as well. Therefore, reading this book, you're not just



learning about different issues to do with the politics of sexuality, but actually it's also cultural education because you can lean into what it is like to live in Kenya or wherever one of the interviewers may find themselves.

MBS ([14:15](#)):

When you talk about in a prologue, as you read about that journey towards freedom and autonomy, the other phrase that struck a chord for me was this sense of taking back power. I'm wondering how you think about power and how it works.

Minna ([14:30](#)):

Yeah. Taking back power is something that should really be at the forefront of not only feminists work, but the collective human projects. To me, power is one of the most imperative notions to reimagine and to unlearn everything that we think about power. When we think about the definitions of power, they're typically almost synonymous with words like violence and dominance, authority, coercion. When we utilize the conventional definitions of power, we in some ways, even those of us who are trying to resist those conventional abuses of power, there's a chance of merely reinforcing those notions. I think that we need to redefine power and reimagine what power can look like. That's something that I've actually been doing quite actively. I coined a term called exertions in my book, *Sensuous Knowledge*. Exertions is a way of looking at power that conveys a life force and possibility and connection with others and the entire ecological system that we exist in. I could speak about exertions for ages, but definitely power is a big deal for me..

MBS ([16:24](#)):

I want to learn more about this because one of the previous guests on this podcast, Matthew Berson, a white man, has written a book about the power of giving away power. It's very intriguing to me as a White man as well, A privileged white man. How do we engage in power in a way that doesn't suck us into it?



Can you reinvent power completely, or does the very act of getting engaged in that, is that just part of the necessity of trying to disrupt the systems that are around us that don't work for us so much anymore?

Minna ([17:00](#)):

I think that everything is always about intention. If we enter a space of conversation and ideas around wherever it might be with the intention to explore if there's something new available and with the intention to not reinforce oppressive and destructive ways of thinking and ways of relating, then I think that it is always possible. Intention is something that I think we all should be grappling with. Martin Luther King said something about power which I love but I can't remember exactly so I will paraphrase. He talked about power and love, he talked about them in tandem. He said that that power without love becomes abusive and violent, but equally he said that love without power can easily become submissive and Black agency

MBS ([18:24](#)):

Sentimental and anemic I think is what he says.

Minna ([18:25](#)):

Thank you. Yes. Sentimental.

MBS ([18:30](#)):

I've just pulled up the quote so let me read it so you have it. "Power without love is reckless and abusive and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love."

Minna ([18:48](#)):

Isn't that just so beautiful?



MBS ([18:53](#)):

It is.

Minna ([18:53](#)):

It's beautiful because it just feels instantly true. I hope that that answers your question to some extent. Yes, we can, anyone, whether you are a White man or a Black woman, or wherever you're from, I think bearing that kind of spirit in mind, I certainly believe that we can reimagine power. We can just have that intention to bring more love into power and more power into love, but also to conceptualize that or give it a symbol or an image. It doesn't have to be some kind of theoretical conceptualization. Part of the the notion exertions is that it is one that is rife imagery. Exertion in ancient Greek was the word for power.

Minna ([19:55](#)):

The way that I've imagined exertion is by conversations that I had with them on human natural world with rivers specifically. I spend a lot of intentional time observing rivers and asking rivers to speak to me about power, to teach me about power. Therein, the rivers gave me a lot of imagery. I think that we don't just need a new language. We need new images, new symbols when it comes to how we think of power.

MBS ([20:39](#)):

What's an image or images that the rivers provided for you that helped unlock new ways of feeling into or understanding power for you, Minna?

Minna ([20:51](#)):

Perhaps the image is the way that rivers just head toward their destination. The river starts off from the source and heads toward the mouth. It's throughout that journey, the river meets so many obstacles. There's manmade dams and wares and hydro plants and all sorts. And then it also meets it's journey impeded by climate collapse, deforestation, pollution. Yet, the river just flows



through above the [inaudible 00:21:45], on the side, it just keeps on going toward its destination, which is the ocean. There's something in that imagery that speaks to the way that we can come to power, whether it means to resist or to empower others, but to have that kind of life force almost.

Minna ([22:11](#)):

The thing that makes reversible forward is gravity. I would argue that power is the equivalent of gravity to humans. It is the thing that helps us to move forward in life toward our destination, which people like, is it Albert Maslow, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, his kind of ultimate destination was self-realization, which I quite like, although you can add to it, that part of self-realization is also collective, which I think Maslow actually does. Power is to humans, what gravity is to rivers as we are on the journey towards self-actualization.

MBS ([23:05](#)):

The other word that you use in conjunction with power is joy. Can you tell us what you mean by joy and how does that even play a role when you're thinking about or talking about power?

Minna ([23:21](#)):

Joy is a word that I think is so crucial, especially within movements where there's so much to fight against. There's so much sorrow and despair and anger. Joy is not an answer to it, but it's something that's so easily becomes neglected and yet it kind of is the thing that has the power to liberate us. It is so difficult to oppress and to dominate a person or a group of people who feel joy. When I say joy, I should add, I intentionally use joy rather than happiness because I'm trying to convey something almost sensuous, kind of political and spiritual at the same time. The kind of joy, the kind of political joy that I'm speaking about is something that emerges when you combine rage with utopianism or something like that.



Minna ([24:51](#)):

It's a conscientious joy in which you are intentional about joy because there's so much tragedy around you. It's almost a post tragic state of being. There's some material you could compare. You could make a case that the focus on happiness as it is tied to consumerism in our contemporary society, it's kind of almost pre-tragic. It's a narrative that exists where people are unaware of the suffering around them. The kind of joy that I'm speaking about is something that emanates from the realization that there is a lot of suffering. There's also a lot of reason to keep alive and to keep enlivened together with others.

MBS ([25:52](#)):

Is there any danger? I fully understand that piece around that the joy is an enlivening act. Happiness as a temporary fleeting purchase and joy has a deeper and liveliness to it. Whereas, you talk about it being a post tragic state, is there danger of passivity or losing activism or actually losing the anger and the rage that makes you go, this needs to be disrupted. This needs to be different. I suspect there are people who are Black and/or feminist and/or allies to Black feminism who go, you know what, it's the anger that is the thing that drives us. Not a sensuous knowledge, not a thing of joy.

Minna ([26:51](#)):

Yeah. I think that's a really good question, by the way, and an important one. That's why I said that the joy that I'm speaking of is one that comes from a combination of rage. So not even just anger, but actually rage and a utopian hope almost. I think that anger is, it certainly has its place and it has been so important if you look at the Black liberation movement, for instance. It has really led to a lot of demonstrations, which in turn have led to structural change. But also, that is the kind of narrative that has a lot of power, a lot of prominence in the discussion. But actually once again, when you look at Black feminists approaches, this question of joy is so glaring throughout.



Minna ([27:53](#)):

Because Black women as a group has been excluded from so many institutions of power, including education, including liberation movements, which are very patriarchal, we have always sought to do transformative work with things like with the arts, for instance, with nature. So through gardening, through rituals, through dance, and all of these things really convey and provide the image of what I mean when I say joy. It's combining fighting and healing into one. I think if we focus strictly on anger, then we're just fighting and not healing, and we need to be doing both.

MBS ([28:46](#)):

Minna, to shift slightly, I'm curious to know where you feel at home because you're a woman who's lived in many countries and this conversation at a more abstract level is also about finding home, returning to freedom as you could call as a sense of returning home. I'm curious to hear where you feel home is for you.

Minna ([29:09](#)):

What a great question to reflect on. Where do I feel home? The first thing that comes to mind for me is in my body. Maybe I should put it this way. I've always felt like I never quite fit in because I have lived in so many places. I come from many different backgrounds, religions, speak different languages, which are all of course also things that aren't are huge gifts in my life. But one consequence is that I've always felt that I never fit in. For such a long time, I felt like I didn't know where home was. I feel at home everywhere where I find myself. It feels important to me to say that. Yeah. I feel at home in my body.

Minna ([30:09](#)):

The other thing that comes to mind is I feel at home in words. I feel at home in literature, whether I am writing or reading, I think that's one of the things that brings me into my body actually is to read or to write. If I have traveled



somewhere where I feel [inaudible 00:30:34] I felt a little bit estranged or something, then I would pick up a book and I'll always have books, they feel a bit like having companions along with me on a journey. I instantly feel at home again.

MBS ([30:56](#)):

Being a reader, but also a writer. I'm curious to know how you decide where to share your voice. What's behind the question is, I saw that you decided to leave Twitter a year or so ago. Your last message is I thank you, but I'm off to go and talk in different places. How do you decide which forums in which to speak?

Minna ([31:25](#)):

I think it's going to sound a bit esoteric, but it has to do with the energy or the heart and soul of a place. Twitter, I really struggled with Twitter before leaving because it just started to feel like I was being complicit in creating a culture and a discourse that I loathe. That I think is really toxic and destructive. I tried for weeks, if not months, if not years, actually because the last two, three years of my time on Twitter. I feel like I was trying to have conversations with people but because of the energy of that space and the algorithms and all that, it just felt impossible to have conversations that were social or critical or just engaging. I quite spontaneously, even though it had been something that was probably burning me for a long period of time, but I quite spontaneously left Twitter.

Minna ([32:42](#)):

I guess I did sense that I really wanted to put my writerly imagination into work that it feels more substantive. More long form writing and into writing that can really communicate with others in a way in which there isn't so much separation and which isn't adapting. I just want to talk to people and you can't really do that on Twitter. What works is preaching to people, educating people and I just felt like I just want to talk. That's kind of what I've been doing more and more of. No matter how much one imagines that you can just spend an hour there a day



or whatever, 20 minutes even, it takes up a lot of time. Even if you're not physically on the platform, you're kind of thinking about what somebody tweeted or what you tweeted. It has freed up a lot of time for me, which I'm grateful for.

MBS ([33:55](#)):

Yeah. Exactly. Minna, I've so enjoyed this conversation. As a final question, is there anything that needs to be said that hasn't yet been said between you and me.

Minna ([34:04](#)):

Nothing other than I've really enjoyed this conversation as well and thank you so much for inviting me to be part of your very lovely podcast. It's been such a pleasure.

MBS ([34:13](#)):

One of the recurring themes of these conversations in this podcast from guests like Matthew Berson or Dr. Karen Heldman, is about the elusive, slippery, essential qualities of power. Minna tapped into the image of rivers. Emerging from the source, that's literal, but it's also a powerful metaphor. Being fed by tributaries, swelling, winding its way to the ocean, flowing finally into that bigger hole. Now, I think for Minna in particular, she's talking about the taking back of power and rivers can certainly work as a metaphor, as a picture for the sense of self growth and learning.

MBS ([35:02](#)):

But in our conversation, what really struck a chord for me is this connection between power and joy. So often when we get into these conversations, they're marked by a lack of joy, a seriousness, a carefreeness. I do think the image of intermingling joy, personal and embodied with power, which is so often abstract and dispersed, is a really powerful and interesting way of engaging in this



conversation in a way that's new and different. Now, if you'd like to learn more about Minna, you can find her on Instagram, Msafropolitan, M-S-A-F-R-O-P-O-L-I-T-A-N. And in fact, that's the word you just want to Google and you'll find her blog and her website and access to her books as well. Thanks for being part of this.

MBS ([35:55](#)):

I Really appreciate having you as a listener, being able to meet guests such as Minna Salami. If this conversation about the sex lives of African women and power and joy and rivers has struck a chord, well, maybe there's somebody in your world that you can recommend this particular interview to. Thank you for passing the word along. Thank you for giving it a review on your favorite podcast app. If you want more, of course, there's a Duke Humphrey's, our membership site, totally free, but signing up gives you access to interviews and downloads and transcripts and much more. In any case, I can say that you're awesome and you're doing great.