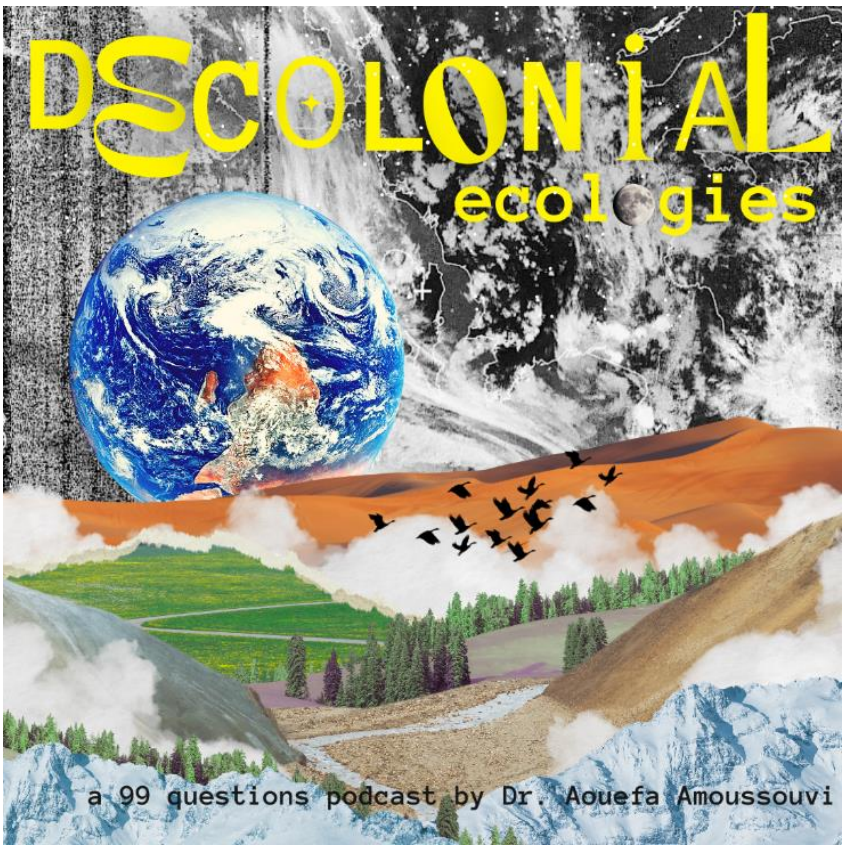
HUMBOLDT FORUM

DECOLONIAL ECOLOGIES

A 99 QUESTIONS PODCAST BY DR. AOUEFA AMOUSSOUVI

TRANSCRIPT



ABOUT THIS PODCAST

In ***Decolonial Ecologies*** we talk about the history of ecology and how it became a scientific academic field interconnected with systems of power and oppression.

Colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, Eurocentrism and heteronormativity have been applied to produce ecological knowledge that claims to be universal and objective. Therefore, museums and universities have contributed to shape and justify an extractive way of inhabiting the Earth.

You will hear researchers, activists and artists who challenge the Western mainstream narrative on ecology with intersectional feminist and queer perspectives, perspectives from Black, Indigenous and People of Color. We will discuss decolonial practices in both the Global South and the Global North to more ethically respond to the current climate and social crises.

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Dr. Aouefa Amoussouvi

Aouefa Amoussouvi 00:33
Welcome to the *Decolonial Ecologies* podcast series, a podcast series in which we talk about the history of ecology, how it became a scientific academic field interconnected with systems of power and oppression. Colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, Eurocentrism and heteronormativity have been applied to produce ecological knowledge that claims to be universal and objective. Therefore, museums and universities have contributed to shape and justify an extractive way of inhabiting the earth. In each episode, you will hear a researcher, an activist or an artist who challenges the Western mainstream narrative on ecology with intersectional feminist and queer perspectives, perspectives from Black, Indigenous and People of Color. We will discuss decolonial practices in both the Global South and the Global North to more ethically respond to the current climate and social crises. Besides individual and citizen actions, we will also take a look at the responsibility of museums and universities to deconstruct the colonial heritage of their own structures. For example, we will discuss how restitution of colonial artifacts by museums can be seen as a part of the climate and environmental justice agenda.

SHOW NOTES – TRAILER

Malcolm Ferdinand, "A Decolonial Ecology: Thinking from the Caribbean World" (2021):

https://www.politybooks.com/bookdetail?book_slug=decolonial-ecology-thinking-from-the-caribbean-world--9781509546220

99 Questions Dialogue with Malcolm Ferdinand and Jason Allen-Paisant: "(De)Colonial Ecology - For The Possibilities of 'Thinking With'" (2022):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YgqV-YwpdIg&t=1s

EPISODE 1 - The Colonial History of Natural Parks and Conservation Lies with Dr. Mordecai Ogada

Synopsis

In the first episode of our series we learn about the colonial history of conservation parks and conservation structure in the Global South, especially Africa, and how those conservation structures are entangled with colonialism and colonial powers. Our guest Dr. Mordecai Ogada, wildlife ecologist from Kenya, conservation policy expert and co-author, together with John Mbaria, of the book “The Big Conservation Lie” tells us about the creation of conservation parks as white spaces and the lack of integration of Black and Indigenous people within the conservation discourse. We also explore how the Western wildlife and conservation narrative is depicted in mainstream media and the arts. Besides, we reflect on how to deal, as individuals, with traveling to conservation areas and finding ways to act responsible with regards to nature and the environment.

Speakers

Dr. Mordecai Ogada, Dr. Aouefa Amoussouvi

Aouefa Amoussouvi 00:33

Welcome to the *Decolonial Ecologies* podcast series, a podcast series in which we talk about the history of ecology, how it became a scientific academic field interconnected with systems of power and oppression. Colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, Eurocentrism and heteronormativity have been applied to produce ecological knowledge that claims to be universal and objective. Therefore, museums and universities have contributed to shape and justify an extractive way of inhabiting the earth. In each episode, you will hear a researcher, an activist or an artist who challenges the Western mainstream narrative on ecology with intersectional feminist and queer perspectives, perspectives from Black, Indigenous and People of Color. We will discuss decolonial practices in both the Global South and the Global North to more ethically respond to the current climate and social crises. Besides individual and citizen actions, we will also take a look at the responsibility of museums and universities to deconstruct the colonial heritage of their own structures. For example, we will discuss how restitution of colonial artefacts by museums can be seen as a part of the climate and environmental justice agenda. I'm Aouefa Amoussouvi, I'm your host for this podcast series. In this episode, our guest is Dr. Mordecai Ogada. Dr. Ogada is a Kenyan wildlife ecologist, conservation policy expert and author of the book "The Big Conservation Lie: The Untold Story of Wildlife Conservation in Kenya". Yeah, so we are very, very grateful. So myself, Aouefa Amoussouvi, and the entire team of the 99 Questions podcast series, we're very grateful and honored to have you, Dr. Mordecai Ogada, today to talk about conservation and the entanglement of conservation with the colonial history.

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 02:56
My pleasure to be here. Thank you very much for inviting me to this podcast and I look forward to talking to you guys.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 03:04
Yes. So my first question is: Could you give us a brief overview of the history of conservation and the different conservation parks in Africa?

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 03:17
Yes, thank you. The history of conservation structure that we have in Africa today goes back to early, early 20th century, about 1910 when Theodore Roosevelt made his famous safari to Africa - and the area he covered was actually in Kenya - and sent back specimens and pictures to the Smithsonian Institution and the American Museum of Natural History, lots of photos and specimens of animals that he entered and landscapes that he visited. And this really made people fascinated with African people. They're fascinated with the African wildlife and other landscapes of the biodiversity. This was also the height of colonial power in Africa. All the colonial powers were at the top of the extractive industry and building of riches in Europe and their brutality, also in the colonies that they had taken over. So this all came together, that this is something precious that needed to be kept for Europeans to come and see, Europeans to come and hunt and they needed areas of Africa that were left for them alone. So the different colonies built it up in different ways but still, the romantic picture over the safari and hunting and tourism and fascination with African wildlife is still that picture that came from Roosevelt's safari and it still remains very much unchanged in Africa today.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 04:54
Yes, and in your book you also say that conservation parks were actually first recreational parks for the colonial settler.

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 05:09
Yes. Referring to Kenya, particularly, the national parks ordinance in Kenya was about areas set aside strictly for recreation by European settlers. Indigenous, Black Africans were prohibited from getting into those places. So that is why they were set up and many more national parks were set up towards the mid-20th century as independence came. Especially after 1961 when Harold Macmillan gave the speech about winds of change blowing across Africa, many national parks were set up and they were set up to function very much as white spaces in a continent that was quickly gaining independence and in an area where Black people are quickly gaining their freedom. So we needed some of these recreational spaces remaining for settlers or tourists, as it were.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 06:09
And if I understand well, it's also that during the independence, those conservation parks were a way for the former colonial empire to ensure that they would still own piece of land in the former colonies and also resources within those lands.

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 06:31
Yes, because that's how they function. Because if you look at the national parks or conservation structures in Kenya, for example, they were set up not by people who didn't know anything about conservation. Most of them were set up and managed by soldiers, British soldiers, who were demobilized from the Second World War from 1945. When the war ended, they came and settled in Africa, they became game wardens. Some of them were running hunting safaris and some of them were wardens to sort of keep the locals out of these lands. So they were very much areas of colonial or white settler ownership of land and even after independence, when independence came, most of the other sectors in Kenya were, and other African countries, were taken over by locals, by Black Africans. They took over the education sector, health sector, business and all that. But the conservation sector for many years remained still in the hands of the descendants of these settlers and Western white interests. So this came from colonial interests. Now they're owned by tourism interests and conservation interests but still white people.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 08:06
I'm currently based in Berlin. The Humboldt Forum institution who hosts this podcast is also based in Berlin and in the same city in 1884, Africa was cut into pieces and shared between the different European colonial empires, and those European empires also agreed on commercial treaties. Could you give us an example of continuity of colonialism between the time around the Berlin Conference and today?

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 08:42
Yes. I think, as I said, the colonialism has disappeared in most sectors. But it still remains in the environmental and conservation sector because after those were divided into countries, they divided the country, the countries gained independence. But these white spaces, national parks and reserves and in some cases even those ranch lands remained for many, in white hands, for many years to come. In fact, in South Africa it remained until 1994 when the apartheid ended and the Group Areas Act ended. But moving forward, the way we practice safari tourism and conservation still ensure the sphere of white influence in Africa even up to over 100 years after the original Berlin conference. And this is something that we need to address now because environmental decisions, global environmental decisions are being done, are still being done in Europe and other places in the West. So, as we discussed these things, Berlin is still an important place and I've also taken part in some decolonialization talks at a hotel in Berlin, but still so much work needs to be done. Even though it's good we're having these conversations, a lot of work needs to be done. There's reparations of various artefacts from various places in Europe but still, even those reparations, I don't think we are doing them in the right way because it's good that the things are

going back but we should not be celebrating it. These are things that were stolen from people who were killed and oppressed. We should not praise someone for giving it back. When a robber returns something, you take it back but you don't say, "Thank you" and "You're wonderful" and all that. You shouldn't have stolen in the first place. So these are some of the things we need to talk about but it's good that the conversations are starting. But what the conversations going on now are just bringing out, the way colonialism has survived for all these years, in the form of environmental movements, in the form of artefacts in museums like in the MARKK Museum in Hamburg, there's the Central Africa Museum in Tervuren, Belgium, the British Museum in London and all these museums. So we've got…we have started but we still got a long way to go.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 11:25
Yeah, and my next question is about the representation of the ecologist heroes and typical and famous conservationist. What do they have in common and could you give us a few names?

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 11:42
Yes, the typical conservation icons, especially talking about Africa, we talk about George Adamson, the late George Adamson, Jane Goodall, Sir David Attenborough, the late Dan Fauci. And there are a lot of names but one thing they all have in common is that they're all white. We do not have any, any, any Black African to this day recognized internationally as a conservation icon or a conservation hero and this can only mean two things: That either, Black Africans do not care anything about the environment or that conservation is racist, conservation practices are racist. And I think it means the racism because Black Africans do care about the environment. We depend on our environment. So if we destroyed it, we would all die and that's why we still have wildlife in Africa because we care about our environment and biodiversity.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 12:43
Also, I know that in one of your talks you talked about the very problematic children book of Tarzan and I would like maybe you to give us, yeah, to say a few words about this book which is one among others. And also, something that is very similar is the way how the mainstream wildlife documentaries on TV are often very similar and yeah, can you give us a few words?

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 13:20
Yes, the prejudices and discrimination in conservation is…that's why it's complex because it comes from many different places. First, like, "The Legend of Tarzan", this is a fictional story written by American author Edgar Rice Burroughs in 1912. The first version I think of now, obviously, these cartoons, there's many other books, there's movies about it and all that. But it was based on the story of a white child that grew up amongst…a white noble child, actually, that grew up amongst wild animals somewhere in Africa on his own and managed to commune directly with them and understand each other with them in the

absence of any other human being. And this was published around the same time that Roosevelt had just taken his great safari. It was the peak of colonialism and it brought in the romance of white people sort of "owning" the wildlife and conservation narrative in Africa. And it grew very powerful and this art made it acceptable. That's why even today, nobody thinks it's strange that all conservation icons in Africa are white because we assume "Yeah, that's what it's supposed to be". Actually, Jane Goodall, in the documentary, in her biography, says she was inspired to do her work with chimpanzees, she was inspired by the story of Tarzan which is very strange, but that's what she said herself. And I think we have to look closely at this propaganda that exists, even in electronic media. David Attenborough's documentaries, they never say there's no Black people in Africa. They don't say that but they never show Black people in Africa. So somebody who watches that and gets inspired by that, they get inspired by an image of an Africa that has no Black people and they get inspired by an image of Africa that's just landscapes, beautiful wildlife and white people who are saving the wildlife and telling us all the wonderful things about the wildlife. So it's a lot of these, the arts can be very harmful propaganda. Even my personal experience, I'm a carnivore biologist and I had...it was very difficult to get funding for studying hyenas because "The Lion King" movie had come out and hyenas were all the bad guys. Yeah, it's very childish but that's the truth of how conservation works and that's the problem. We must resist this propaganda.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 16:03
Yes, yeah. I mean, like, myself, I grew up in France and I didn't question that all the wildlife documentaries I watched were white Western people going in a foreign country and teaching me how this country, this wildlife works. They are not from there but they are experts.

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 16:32
Yes, this is the truth and it became normal. So everyone accepted this. I mean even kids in Kenya watch wildlife documentaries about Kenya that don't show Black people. It became normal and you know, that's why you see a lot of times even, it's normal, it has become normal. So that's why you see when Prince William is always talking about the population growth of Africa is too high. He never talks about population in the UK or other places. But we always talk about population growth in Africa being a threat to biodiversity is because this absurd propaganda has become normal.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 17:27
How are Indigenous, Black people, People of Color represented in the conservation programs and discourses?

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 17:39
They're still represented very negatively. Either they're absent but when they are present, they are in a negative light. People talk about the problems in Kenya, we talk about the...some talk about livestock, who say there's too many cows and goats and all these things and those are a threat to the environment.

And this is a deep problem and it's a contradiction because Kenya is the cradle of mankind. I think the oldest human remains were found in Kenya, like 1.2 million years old, in Northern Kenya. So humans have been in Kenya for over a million years so they cannot become a problem in 2022. And this is a big contradiction, and the other thing is that anyone who questions the experts - like you said, these people present themselves as experts - anyone who questions that, you become sort of ostracized or vilified. So right now, unless someone who's keeping his goat, that's negative, is called unsustainable. Someone who gets wood fuel from the forest is called unsustainable, who gets water from the river is called unsustainable. But a tourist who flies 10,000 kilometres, the carbon footprint, and stays in a lodge with air conditioning and drinking cold champagne is called sustainable. Yeah, so this is the negative depiction of Black African people and those that are the only ones who are accepted are those who work to advance the Western narrative. So it's great if an African is working in a lodge serving drinks or if he's working as a Program Officer for WWF or if he's working for Frankfurt Zoological Society, then he's a good African. But if he's doing his own thing, then he's a problem.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 19:45
Yeah. Yeah, and, I'm like, on this you already say a little bit, but what are the biggest contradictions and even lies within the conservation narrative?

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 20:02
Yeah, the other contradiction that lies, there's obviously the one about human presence of landscapes. The lie that there is nature...nature is not something that exists away from humans or humans do not exist away from nature. We did not come from another planet, so we are part of nature. The other thing is that the global environmental crisis is caused by capitalism, by human behaviour, not human numbers, but human behaviour and consumption patterns. So it's a big myth now to try and say that capitalism can save nature. By this, I mean tourism is capitalism, it can't save nature. Carbon credits is capitalism. In fact, it's like, carbon credits is like organized crime. It's like a pyramid scheme. It cannot save nature. What they call green finance, renewables: Renewables are made from batteries which are mined, made from chemicals like coltan mined in the forests. So that cannot save nature. We must consume less. We must consume less, we must waste less, we must take care of our environment and reduce pollution because that's emissions. Carbon credits don't reduce emissions. And those kinds of things... that they tell you that you must use renewable and rechargeable batteries, we recharge them with coal, with coal generated electricity. So these are all gimmicks and contradiction. And again, one person owning or controlling thousands and thousands of acres of land, that's not sustainable. That is not conservation. That is selfishness and greed and capitalism. So we must share what we have, we must consume less. We must waste less and maybe use better, formulate better chemicals, better fertilizers and this kind of thing. So that's how it works. It doesn't work to remove Africans from a forest and say, "That's conservation". That is just a violation of human rights.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 22:24
Yeah. I mean, like, on this, when you say that it's not sustainable that one person owns a huge piece of land. I think that you used in some talks and also in your book the term of “micro-colonialism”. I think that's…I’m like, tell me if I'm wrong, but you explain that in the time of colonization, countries and empires would own other countries. But nowadays, it's rich…

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 22:54
…yes, capitalists, yeah.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 22:56
…individuals and big corporation that own huge piece of land in the Global South.

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 23:03
Yes, this is the situation now and it's important that your listeners can understand it this way because right now there are these big capitalists who control because…I even, I shouldn't say they own because they don't buy anything. You know, when someone, when I own my car or my jacket or whatever, it's because I paid money. These guys don't actually buy anything. They control it through agents like in colonialism, colonial days, there were commercial agencies from these countries, like we had the British East India Company, we had the German Trading Company and these kind of things. So they are the ones that went and grabbed resources. Today, the companies that do this are conservation organizations like The Nature Conservancy, like Conservation International, African Wildlife Foundation, these are the…these big conservation organizations, they're the agents so they get money from capitalists and then they go and take control of areas by calling them conservancies or protected areas. And then these capitalists can own those areas and they get all the dollars coming in from carbon trade. They…some of them get money from oil exploration in those lands and if you look at…there's a map, a project called “Nature Africa” which was developed at the World Parks Congress in Marseille, 2021. It shows a map of these lands they're controlling across Africa and almost all of them are lands that go across international boundaries. Find a land that goes from Tanzania or goes from Zambia to Botswana, to Zimbabwe and across the borders. So none of these countries is aware or can control this land, but it's controlled by the conservation organization and these are microcolonies. They're also taking seascapes, it's not just landscapes. So The Nature Conservancy right now controls 210,000 square kilometres of seascape around the Seychelles, so Seychelles is basically a colony now of The Nature Conservancy and this kind of thing, and whoever funds Nature Conservancy. So we need to wake up to this and stop praising these people as conservationists. There are all these projects to conserve 10 million acres of land and all this. We must ask questions. Where are the people in those 10 million acres? Where are they going to go? What have you paid for the 10 million acres? What are you going to do with it and what are the rights of the people who actually own it? It's a big global scheme but it's very well hidden with propaganda and public relations.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 26:01
Yeah. It seems that one of the most powerful tool used in this propaganda is language and in your book you give a few examples of those problematic terms. For example: environmental economy, sustainable utilization and management, innovating and alternative livelihood. Can you explain those terms and tell us why they are so problematic?

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 26:32
Yes, they're very problematic because they refer to…they're almost capitalist terms, but there's also racial prejudice amongst them because when you find someone like a Black person killed a wild animal. Let's say…let's give the species: A Black person kills an impala, he's called a poacher. A white person will kill an Impala, he's called a hunter. The Black person will eat the impala meat and they call it bush meat. The white person will eat the impala meat and they'll call it game meat or venison. So these are things they use in language. In Kenya we even have Black people who raise livestock, they're called herders, and white people who raise livestock, they're called ranchers, and it's the same sort of thing everywhere. So you see, when white people can travel across Africa, whether backpacking or whatever, we call them tourists. When Black people travel across Africa we call them nomads. And all these have negative connotations. A Black person who settles in Europe is called an immigrant. A white person who settles in Africa is called an expatriate or a settler. Yeah, and all these different terms. So there's prejudice in all these terms and we need to be careful about it because…even sustainable, you find the UN and global bodies like the United Nations and all these are all using this term "sustainability". Sustainability is not a technical term, it's a subjective term. It's like lovability: Is Mordecai lovable or not? That's subjective. So sustainability is not an objective term. What is that, like I said, with a man with this herd of goats, they say it's unsustainable but a tourist, like, from the US to spend a holiday is called sustainable. So sustainability must be…we must be allowed to develop our own standards and definitions of sustainability, and removing people from their homelands for carbon trading, carbon credits, for conservation of wildlife, it is not sustainable. It is not socially sustainable or politically sustainable or even environmentally sustainable. So these are some of the terms we have to look at. Some of these places are sacred, even in spiritual beliefs, like Mount Kenya and all that. So we have to look at all those cultural sustainability, political, environmental, economic, all those different factors and we stop using these terms like they're objective or technical or powerful terms because the human rights violation exists in a lot of those terms used in media.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 29:37
Yeah. I also think that, yeah, a lot of area where resources are being used and in order to protect the wildlife is really…those resources are never going to the local people.

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 29:55

Yes. This is a very important point because a lot of us…you see, someone has given a million dollars for conservation in a given place. Most of the money is paid for, is paid to "experts" who come from the same country where the million dollars came from. So it's almost like a money…it's money laundering. So none of that money goes into, or very little of that money goes into actual conservation or to local people. In Kenya, for example, as of two years ago, the amount of money donor funds coming into Kenya for conservation was around 25 million US dollars a year. Out of that, only 2 million was going to Kenya Wildlife Service which is the government conservation agency, and the rest was going to NGOs, basically going into people's pockets. So it's a big scam if I can use the term "scam", and also a lot of conservation areas like in Northern Kenya, we have conservancies where in the same area where they were doing oil exploration, and the oil exploration companies were donating to the conservation NGO. So you can see this conflict of interest that happened in conservation.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 31:43

Dr. Ogada, you are based in Kenya but your work focuses on Africa and the Global South in general, I would even say, like, worldwide in general. Is a dysfunctioning model of conservation the same worldwide?

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 32:01

Yes, the situation across the different countries which were colonized by different European policies is pretty similar, especially in Africa. But if you look at the world, the footprint is probably not as heavy in Asia and I think there are many theories about this but I think Asia, what maybe saved them is that they had very well-established that ancient religions when colonialism came in because missionary work was a very important part of colonialism. And the way Christianity didn't really take root in Asia maybe saved them from a lot of the weight of colonialism. They are sort of better off in terms of control of their natural resources. But coming to Africa, I've talked a lot about Kenya but look at Germany: Tanzania, for example, was a German colony and if you look at the sort of leading conservation icon from Europe there, the late Bernhard Grzimek who was the main driving force behind removing the Maasai from huge areas of Northern Tanzania to create Serengeti National Park and other conservation areas. And Grzimek himself was, if you look at his history, he was a member of the Nazi Party. And he's still celebrated now, even in the Frankfurt Zoological Society still has the Grzimek prize for conservation which they give. There's still monuments to him and his son in Northern Tanzania. And this cultural removal of people still goes on just this year. Thousands of Maasai people have been ejected from their homes in Loliondo, also in Northern Tanzania, violently to make room for some conservation tourist and tourism facility there. So many of them are actually refugees in Southern Kenya now. If you - there are some that are more absurd -, if you look at Namibia and other former German colonies, you find some of their most serious conservation program is for wild horses and these were just horses that were brought by German soldiers in the First World War, and they just went wild. So then that's normal horses. But now you find

conservation authorities in Namibia are treating them as endangered species and they're even killing hyenas which are African wildlife. They're killing hyenas because hyenas are killing horses. So it's this kind of crazy colonial hangover that remains in the conservation sector and because of the history of world war, Germany lost their colonies and a lot of German people right now sort of forgot that Germany also had colonies and very strong colonial influence in Africa. It's the same even for former French colonies, as well. You have Gabon where logging interests are the ones financing WWF, refined oil companies like Total are funding forest conservation programs in Gabon. And that's where the logging is going on and this kind of thing. So it's still very much a very strong colonial footprint. It's just that it does not happen with soldiers and guns the way it happened in the 19th century. It's happening through capitalism, through conservation organizations and through resource extraction.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 35:48
So you just say that the land is not taken by guns?

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 35:56
Yes.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 35:57
But in your book you say that the land is not kept with guns, that the people working in this conservation area are like soldiers and they also sometimes have the order to shoot people who try to enter.

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 36:19
Yes, yes. This is one of the big contradictions because NGOs are meant to be like civil society organizations but in conservation now, they're getting into armed law enforcement with guns, using guns and bullets and these kinds of things. And yeah, these conservation areas, if you look at wildlife areas or nature conservation in Europe, for example, you don't find it guarded by people with guns or even in the United States you don't find guarded people with guns. In Africa, these areas are guarded with guns and if you go in there, you are liable to be shot. I mean, we know these rangers. These rangers, they carry guns, they don't carry handcuffs. So they're not going to arrest anybody and I think this is a deep problem. It's a deep philosophical problem. So you find former military people like from former U.S. Marines, former British Marines, defence contractors who used to work in Iraq and Afghanistan, they're all coming to conservation in Africa. And these are, a lot of these are really messed up people who just...they're looking for a place where they can shoot other people, and conservation right now in Africa is the easiest place to do that. So we must question the role of these people. And why peaceful, I think, what are called peaceful organizations like WWF, why they hire violent people from Europe, America, Israel, and other militarized societies. Why they had to come and enforce conservation, do conservation law enforcement in Africa? And the problem is that with the Kenya Wildlife Service, you know, it's a government organization, there's a command structure. There's a reporting structure and they have legal obligations about how they handle

their arms, fire arms. These people who work for NGOs are not under any of those structures. And this creates a lot of human rights violations and yes, there have been a good number of killings in Kenya that I know, even in Tanzania, even in Uganda, Congo, Cameroon, there's been a lot of beatings, torture and killings of Indigenous minorities by conservation law enforcement, either foreign or foreign funded law enforcement. And I think it's something the world needs to realize. Even those who give money, who give their money to these conservation organizations, they need to understand what's going on with their money.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 39:20
Yeah. Would you recommend to our listeners not to donate to NGOs and not to travel to conservation parks, even if they are labelled as ecotourism?

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 39:34
Yes, starting from the part of the nation, we are now a very well-informed world. We look very closely even at labels of foods we buy and this kind of thing. You must be responsible, you must look and know exactly where your 50 euros or whatever is going. If you cannot find and cannot be informed for sure where the money is going, then don't give the money. If you want to help the environment, you may as well help an organization in Germany or America where you are, where you can see exactly what they're doing. If someone cannot tell you exactly what they're doing with your money in Africa, don't give them money. And that's what we should do. Now, as far as tourism, I think traveling is a privilege and it's a wonderful thing and we should all do it. But there's an important thing about the mentality of why you travel. You must understand your traveling is not saving any wildlife or any person in Africa. We in Africa will be fine if you don't come, the wildlife will be fine if you don't come. It was fine before you came and it will be fine after you go. So it's...once you have that mentality that you are traveling to Africa to learn about Africa, to see Africa, to enjoy the beauty of the place, to meet the people and all that, then you have a wonderful time. But if you think you're Tarzan going to end up somewhere in a bush alone in the forest with animals, then it's better you don't come. You can see a gorilla in the Bronx Zoo in New York. It's better that if you don't want to see Maasai people, don't come to Kenya. If you don't want to see Samburu people, don't come to Kenya. If you don't want to see Indians, don't go to India because this is the thing: Countries are not just a piece of land, countries are people. So let's expand our thinking around travel. Don't look for what Roosevelt was doing. What Roosevelt was doing was rubbish. The reality of today is that there's people in Kenya and these people have wonderful stories and ideas and stuff to share with you. And you come and share and see how they live with their wildlife and all that, and that's the magic of travel. So people certainly should come but we should change the mentality of traveling. And I think African countries are also wrong, also are false about this because when I see tourism posters from Kenya, they show beautiful landscapes and wildlife but they don't show Kenyan people. Or they show Kenyan people only when it's the waiter serving drinks or the driver tour guide, you know, someone who's working for the tourists. It doesn't show just some farmer there farming his vegetables or some guy there with his

cows. And I think that's a very important part of communication that we should develop, communication around tourism because tourists have been thinking that their coming to Africa saves wildlife or saves people. When we had the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism shut down but the wildlife was fine. Wildlife, in fact, they were living in peace. There was no tourism disturbing them. So tourists must realize that what you're doing is you're having a recreation which is wonderful but you're not saving anybody or any wildlife by coming.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 43:25
I think you said a bit earlier, you talked about the term "carbon trading" which is about compensation of the Global North's carbon production with some kind of program in the Global South?

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 43:44
Yes, yes. This is sort of touches also the question we talked about. Things like...there's a lot of things that are labelled “green” and “eco” and “sustainable” these days. Carbon trading for one thing is...it's a money laundering scheme on a global scale. It's probably the biggest scam that's been done in the history of mankind. And the fact is, people must be responsible for the environment. Do not use something that's environmentally unfriendly and then you think it's better because you went and paid some money to somebody. So if, for example, if someone's building a factory in Germany that's manufacturing chemicals and is polluting a river, if you give money to go and plant trees in Kenya, it does not help the river in Germany. What we must do is reduce pollution in Germany, reduce emission in Germany or the United States or wherever, so that you don't destroy the global environment. And things like global warming, it's everyone, its emissions causing it. Money does not reduce emissions. Money just makes some people rich. That's all it does. And even when products are called sustainable you have to ask: How is it sustainable? Where does it come from? Why aren't we consuming local things? I mean, I see people consuming sustainably grown vegetables and it is flown across the world 15,000 kilometres from another continent, and they call it sustainable. So those are the things that are causing the environmental crisis. We are using renewables and rechargeable batteries. Do we know where the coltan comes from for the batteries? Do we know that there are children being abused, working in mines, slave labor. So if we call an electric car sustainable, we must look at where the batteries are coming from. I know there's no children working in oil production, oil wells or oil rigs. So I know my petrol engine car does not affect children. But if you drive an electric car that gives no emissions but there are children being abused to mine the coltan, there is another problem. That's the thinking that brings humans into the environment and that's why we must wake up and look beyond green labels, carbon trading and all that. All these things need a lot more scrutinizing. But carbon trading, you don't need to read the label, carbon trading is a scam, it doesn't do anything. And at the global meetings, like COP27, which is going to start in Egypt any day now, we have to look at what our global leaders are talking about there. And as they fly their private jets to go and meet in those places, are they coming out with anything? Because this environment belongs to all of us.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 46:53
I mean, I think that you and your co-author, John Mbaria, did a great, amazing work writing this book.

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 47:04
Thank you.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 47:06
I'm like, to me it was, reading was like a little bomb and I think that the book was a little explosion in the conservation, environmental sector. It was published in 2016. How easy was it to publish this book and what were the responses to it?

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 47:30
Okay, after we wrote the book it was very difficult to find a publisher. Actually, in Kenya no publisher would consider it and eventually, it got published in the United States of America by a public independent publisher called Lens & Pens Publishing. But even after we published it we could not find any bookshop in Kenya that was willing to stock it at first and so, for some period of time, the only way one could get the book was through online sales, like through Amazon. And even after we got it published, it was very difficult to find a place to do, you know, a launch and talk about it. I remember even very liberal spaces, like, even Goethe Institute in Nairobi refused to do a book launch. So it was a very difficult time for me. And you know, I'm a conservation biologist so, suddenly, I could not get any consultancy contracts or any jobs in conservation. And things were pretty difficult at the time, that was between 2017 to 2018. I know my co-author Mbaria also would not, he's an environmental journalist, and he would not get assignments during that period. But from 2019, people started to see that the things we were talking about are true. And now people believe what we are doing, people believe what we are saying. The book is on sale in Kenya, we give talks a lot. I get assignments, teaching, consultancy and various other things. But still a lot of the big conservation organizations are still very uncomfortable with what we say and they still try all they can to oppose me and Mbaria for what we are saying. But yeah, it's a fight we're willing to fight because we don't have any other environment, that we must save it.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 49:43
So I arrive now, or we arrive together at the end of the podcast. I have five questions that I ask all the guests. Could you give us the name of someone who has influenced and inspired your work? For me, this question is about resisting the myth of genius in Western knowledge production where it seems that some people are coming alone to great ideas. And I think that great ideas are always part of work that has been done before and they will bring new great ideas by other people, yeah.

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 50:31

Yes, I think in terms of my inspiration - because I'm an avid reader of African political history - I think the two people who have influenced me most, who inspire me most are both the late Patrice Lumumba, first prime minister of Congo, and the late Thomas Sankara who was president of Burkina Faso. And why they inspire me is because they sought to build their countries from locally, from local ideas, from their own ideas, not from external ideas. They didn't want their countries to become what other people wanted their countries to be. And this is very important in academia because we have people coming from countries with no wildlife, coming to tell us how to conserve wildlife. We have people coming from countries where they are immigrants and settlers, coming to tell us how to live with an environment that we are indigenous to. And the knowledge production systems in academia are a big problem, like what we call peer-reviewed publishing. I always say Africans know how to conserve the environment and people always ask me, "Can you tell me which journal that is written in?". No, it's not written in any journal, we never needed to write it in a journal because we don't care that anybody else read it. We know how to conserve our environment because we depend upon it. And because, you see, a lot of people in Africa live directly off their resources, we drink water from the nearby river. So we are not going to mess up the river because our kids will end up drinking that water. So we keep the nearby grasslands healthy because we know our animals must eat there. Without that grasslands our animals will die and we will die. So it's important to understand that we Africans have knowledge and it resides within us. Nature is not something out there, nature is part of us. I take care of my environment the way I take care of my hand or my leg because I use it every day for survival, and that's a type of thinking that is totally absent in the West. In the West, most people who use water don't have no idea where it comes from. Even now, we are seeing a lot of people have no idea that the gas they use comes from Russia. Yeah, they have no idea where the water they use comes from, the fuel, etcetera, the food they consume comes from. And this, when you get this awareness, then you change your way of thinking. So knowledge production, I think, needs to come from reality, not theory. In conservation science there's a lot of studies of conservation in Africa that studies how elephants live and has no mention of human beings. And you wonder, are these elephants living on the moon or are they living in some place where there's no human beings? But you find scientists, professors in top universities talking about elephants in the absence of humans, talking about lions in the absence of humans, or buffaloes in the absence of humans. And that's ridiculous because we are creating that myth of nature that exists somewhere without people. And that is that human beings being part of nature is the most important lesson that every human being must understand if we want to conserve this planet for future generations.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 54:20

Could you recommend one action that people could do today to enact decolonial ecology?

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 54:30

Yes, I think it's responsibility. You're responsible for where you are and you have to start at home, like, whether it's planting a tree, whether it's conserving water, conserving energy, start with at home where you are, do the responsible thing, close the tap, turn off the lights, don't litter and that kind of thing because everybody owns. There is ownership, if you feel ownership of the environment, then you will be responsible. Someone in the U.S. has no ownership of my home in Kenya, so he cannot come and tell you what do to in Kenya. It doesn't work like that, or he should not come and tell me what to do in Kenya. He should be responsible for that in the U.S. He can come to Kenya and visit and enjoy and share what we have, but he should not tell me what to do. He should not remove me from a part of Kenya to create some project or program. So responsibility must start with every individual where he or she is. Clean the nearby river plant, trees, don't kill the nearby animals because you find people hunting and killing animals in one country, there are going to be conservationists in another country. It doesn't work like that. And remove…we should remove capitalism from it. Completely remove capitalism. Capitalism has never saved anything and will never save anything. Yeah, so it has to be controlled.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 56:02

Wow. It's already a lot but I have three more questions. What are you working on at this moment?

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 56:12

I'm currently working on something connected to what we've been discussing. I'm working on a training program for journalists covering environment to also cover minority, Indigenous minority people's rights. So we are working on things like the terminologies, the questions they should ask and…because journalists are not trained to, are not trained in the environment or not all trained in environmental issues and some of the things escape them. And, for example, the journalists who are told by conservationists that we are empowering the local people, we are giving them a voice, and a journalist should ask, "Who took away their voice? Who took away their power?". It's usually the same guy who's telling you, is giving you the voice. So questions like that. And when they say, "We have started this new conservation area and this guide, it's wonderful", journalists should ask, "So when did you start it?". Say, I started in 2015, the journalist should ask, "What was there before 2015? Or did you bring elephants with you? Did you bring elephants, or leopards, or lions?". And these are the things that journalists should ask and if journalists are trained like that, then we can make the environmental movement a lot more honest. There are a lot of good people and honest people in the environmental movement, but they're being overtaken by the dishonest business people. So we must train journalists to pick out the honest ones.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 57:52

Yes, we will put the reference of this project online with the podcast. The next question is: Do you want, maybe, to add anything to this conversation?

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 58:09
Yes, I think what I can add is that everybody, the environment is all our concern and everybody needs to keep learning. Learning about the environment never stops because the environment never stops moving or changing. So let's always be willing to learn and unlearn. If, and that's been a big problem around the world, when someone tells you they've been working on chimpanzee conservation since 1960 and are still doing that same stuff today, there's a problem. That means a person hasn't learned anything new because it's still not working. If you are running a bank since 1960 and it's still not making profit, they should fire you. You should be doing something different. So if you used to drive cars without exhaust controls in 1980, now we have better exhausts, we have better exhausts. Let's start using less plastic. Let's start using less Styrofoam, throwing away less food and that kind of thing. So let's be ready to learn and unlearn old things and learn new things. The things I'm talking about now…my career in conservation has been about 25 years but the things I'm talking about now are things I've learned in the last six or seven years. Yeah, it's all new, so I didn't know this stuff 20 years ago. So I think that's, if we all have that attitude, then we'll do a lot better.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 59:51
Yeah. Finally, the last, very last question of the podcast for today is: Where can our listener follow you, your projects and find more information?

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 1:00:05
My writings, talks and projects I've worked on are curated on, I've got a website, www.oganda.co.ke. I'm also…you can also find me on social media, particularly Twitter is where I talk a lot about technical things. Twitter, on Facebook, just Mordecai Ogada, you find me there. And I'm always willing to exchange ideas, learn and unlearn new things on those different forums.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 1:00:38
Yes, we put all the references with the release of the podcast. Dr. Ogada, I'm very, very grateful and very, just full of ideas and thoughts by you. I just wish you even more visibility because I think that your work is so important for African people but for all the people in the Global North, in the Global South and I think that people should know about this lie in the environmentalist sector.

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 1:01:16
Thank you very much for having me. It's been my pleasure and I think I've also learned a lot from this conversation and I look forward to listening to the other podcasts in your series as well.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 1:01:26
Yeah, thank you so much. So I wish you a great rest of the day.

Dr. Mordecai Ogada 1:01:31
Thank you very much.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 1:01:32
Concept, research and moderation are made by me, Aouefa Amoussouvi. Sound production: Annelien Van Heymbeeck. Thank you to Sias Wöbling and Lucile Bouvard for ideas and exchanges. Thank you to Julia Richard and Alondra Meier for the assistance and Michael Dieminger for the invitation. This podcast series is commissioned by 99 Questions at the Humboldt Forum.

SHOW NOTES – Episode 1

Dr. Mordecai Ogada:

https://ogada.co.ke/

Twitter - Mordecai Ogada:

https://twitter.com/m_ogada?s=09

John Mbaria & Mordecai Ogada, "The Big Conservation Lie" (2016):

https://www.abebooks.de/9780692787212/Big-Conservation-Lie-Mbaria-John-0692787216/plp

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https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195337709.001.0001/acref-9780195337709-e-0467;jsessionid=23CBE359783DAF813E7AAA370761FFBA

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Harold Macmillan's "Wind of Change" speech:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/february/3/newsid_2714000/2714525.stm

Edgar Rice Burroughs, "Tarzan of the Apes" (1912):

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarzan_of_the_Apes

"Green finance":

https://www.unep.org/regions/asia-and-pacific/regional-initiatives/supporting-resource-efficiency/green-financing

Kenya Wildlife Service:

http://www.kws.go.ke/

Sharm El-Sheikh Climate Change Conference (COP 27):

https://unfccc.int/cop27

Abbreviations:

WWF: World Wide Fund for Nature.

https://www.wwf.org.uk/

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization.

https://dictionary.cambridge.org/de/worterbuch/englisch/ngo

EPISODE 2 - The Global Food System, Climate and Environmental Injustices with Samie Blasingame

Synopsis

Together with activist, researcher and creative Samie Blasingame we take a look at food systems and how today's global food system is connected to and influenced by colonial history and the exploitation of people and ecosystems. We discuss the meanings behind food labels like "organic", "local" or "fair trade" and the realities of people like farmers working in food chain production. We also take a look at food diversity, climate and environmental injustices. Finally, we discuss the responsibility of universities to include more voices from the Global South and marginalized people in the academic fields of ecology and environmental studies.

Speakers

Samie Blasingame, Dr. Aouefa Amoussouvi

Aouefa Amoussouvi 00:33

Welcome to the *Decolonial Ecologies* podcast series, a podcast series in which we talk about the history of ecology, how it became a scientific academic field interconnected with systems of power and oppression. Colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, Eurocentrism and heteronormativity have been applied to produce ecological knowledge that claims to be universal and objective. Therefore, museums and universities have contributed to shape and justify an extractive way of inhabiting the earth. In each episode, you will hear a researcher, an activist or an artist who challenges the Western mainstream narrative on ecology with intersectional feminist and queer perspectives, perspectives from Black, Indigenous and People of Color. We will discuss decolonial practices in both the Global South and the Global North to more ethically respond to the current climate and social crises. Besides individual and citizen actions, we will also take a look at the responsibility of museums and universities to deconstruct the colonial heritage of their own structures. For example, we will discuss how restitution of colonial artifacts by museums can be seen as a part of the climate and environmental justice agenda. I'm Aouefa Amoussouvi, I'm your host for this podcast series. In this episode, our guest is Samie Blasingame. Samie is an American Berlin-based environmental and social justice researcher and activist. She's a community organizer passionate about circular design and global food systems. So welcome, Samie. I'm very, very glad to have you today here.

Samie Blasingame 02:40

Thank you, Aouefa. It's really nice to be here with you. Yeah, I'm happy to be joining. I was a little torn on whether I would want to ultimately do this because on one hand, I think it is lovely to talk with you about food and food systems. But we're also doing it in the context of the Humboldt Forum and as we all know, there is lots of criticism around the existence of this space and, yeah, a lot of strong and legitimate

criticism. And I think there needs to be a stronger action tied to the conversations around what this place means, what it can be used for and the harm that it causes to certain communities. So yeah, I was struggling with those thoughts but, ultimately, do think that since the Humboldt Forum is here and avenues like 99 Questions are trying to discuss and critique how it should be formed now with community, I hope this, yeah, this can be part of that conversation as well.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 03:45
Yes, I'm like, I think that through the discussion, or at least for me, it's very something which is becoming more and more clear that how everything is connected and interconnected, meaning that when we're talking about food, we're also talking about humans that produce the food, that selling the food, that transport the food. We're also talking about, like, Earth and environment where the food is grown and we're also talking about, like, institution, public and private, and international contexts that also created but also continue to maintain the systems that oppress certain people. So I guess that there will be some space in the discussion to talk about those.

Samie Blasingame 04:35
I think we're going to touch on a lot of it. So, very exciting. Thanks for having me.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 04:39
Yeah, thanks for being here. To start, I would like to ask you: Can you please explain what's the global food system? And what made you become interested and even passionate about this subject?

Samie Blasingame 04:54
Yeah, sure. So, when we talk about the food system, we're talking about quite a complex system of...that kind of starts with the sowing and harvesting of crops. It includes the raising of animals but then also food processing, the transportation of food, the preparation and packaging of food and then, of course, retail and gastronomy, and then consumption, but then also the waste of food. All of that is part of a food system. And when we talk about the global food system, we're really talking about the ten or so multinational corporations that own almost all of the food brands that we are familiar with and therefore, they control so much of how we eat and how our land and water and human resources, as well, are used or even exploited all around the world. And my interest in food systems really began with an appreciation for farmers as, what I call, what many people call, land stewards because they are people who are taking care of our land and feeding us and realizing how farmers around the world are some of the people who are the poorest and are the most food insecure people and/or communities, and just realizing how incredibly unjust that is. So my interest was really in figuring out how to better support them and kind of shift the tables in terms of the type of work we value most in our societies.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 06:33
Yeah, and I think that, from what I also understood is, like, when we think about the global food system, we also have to think that how our life - we are today in Berlin, in Germany, in the Global North - and it's important to understand how food habits here are also connected with maybe, like, other places in the world. And I know that you have worked in Kenya on the topic of agriculture and farming. What was, to you, the biggest challenge of the food system currently and in the future there? And is this challenge different from the ones that Germany or other countries in the Global North might be facing in the future?

Samie Blasingame 07:21
Yeah, thank you for that. So yeah, I was very privileged while I was studying and then just after I graduated, also, to work with a group of people who allowed me to visit Kenya and see some of the work they were doing there with local farmers and local organizations. So the work was really about land governance and food security and I was doing communications. I was making, like, little videos about what my team and the local group was doing and that was a lot about community land lease guidelines because in Western Kenya where we were, in Kakamega County, the issue - and this is pretty prominent in many countries, actually - the land inheritance issue of getting land inherited from your father and overtime it's a little smaller and smaller and therefore, you can't do as much with it. But in this community, particularly, we're having a lot of informal lease agreements and you weren't able to, therefore, invest. It was insecure, someone's access to land was insecure so they could not invest in it in a sustainable manner in which they wished to and that were being promoted. And I think that is a very common thing, the issue of land access is a very common thing within agricultural communities all around the world and here in Germany, as well, in Brandenburg, our farmers here are fighting - that's one of the biggest things they're fighting - the land in Brandenburg, it actually has the highest percentage of agricultural investors invested in it. So that means anytime - and it's happening, like, thousands of farms are being lost per year - anytime a farmer loses their land, that land is not becoming a beautiful, sustainable agroecological farm. It's becoming an agroindustrial farm funded by these investors. So that's a huge thing that farmers are dealing with, and then another thing that I think is very prominent amongst farmers everywhere is the limitations they face in trying to do more sustainable agriculture because there's a global paradigm that says that we cannot feed the world that way and that's just...it's just not true.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 09:52
I think that - or you can correct me - but you initiated a podcast series called "Food in my Kiez". I'm like, "Kiez" in German means "neighborhood". You already produced six episodes and in each episode you go in a different area of Berlin and talk to shop owners, project initiators and food consumers. Could you tell us more about this project? How did it start and what was your intention with it?

Samie Blasingame 10:22
Yeah, definitely. So "Food in my Kiez" was a creative, or is a creative research project and the first season of it became a podcast. And it really was started for personal reasons of wanting to better understand and think through my thoughts on the food system and then also to ground myself in this chosen home of mine in Berlin to understand the food that is around me, the people involved in dealing and moving and thinking about that food. So that's really where it started and the intention was to expand the conversation to more and more people. So “Food in my Kiez” is really...I try to make it as community-focused as possible. So in many episodes, there's community questions, I have spent a lot of time in the streets just asking random people questions because I feel like in the spaces here and in many Global North countries that are talking about the "future of food", and I use quotations there, it's not incorporating the perspectives of the city of everyone and all classes and all cultures. Especially here in Berlin, there is a certain group of people who are talking about the “future of food”, it's mostly white, wealthy, upper class. It feels very elitist for many people and it shouldn't feel that way because we all eat and we all contribute to the local food system and even that - I talk about that in the podcast - , what is a local food system? Because when you look around Berlin, there's so many cultures that make up this city but when local food is talked about, we're talking about, like, German food most of the time and so, yeah, just kind of bringing in the different cultures that are represented in the city and I don't see those in the spaces, the food spaces, that I was part of when I was making the podcast.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 12:18
Yeah, and what were the responses to your podcast?

Samie Blasingame 12:22
Yeah, I think it was mostly positive. I didn't get any negative feedback but I'm not sure how big the reach was, I haven't checked in a while the numbers. But yeah, pretty positive feedback. People were happy to have it in a more accessible format, I think. It's a very narrated podcast and it's meant that way to be an enjoyable listen and for people to get in touch with this in a more familiar and easy way. So yeah, that feedback was very positive and I think I'm starting to see more of these conversations about equity and justice within the food spaces that I'm part of and, you know, I think that that kind of has to do with my agitations over the last year of, like, pointing out that certain perspectives are missing.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 13:13
Yeah. You used the word "local" and I think that nowadays there is or there are lots of labels related with food and agriculture, such as "local", "organic", "fair trade", "carbon free". In your opinion, are those labels environmentally and socially sustainable?

Samie Blasingame 13:36

Yeah, so when we talk about "local" labeling, it's really to focus on, like, a local economy and keeping, like, money and, yeah, money in a local economy, right? It's about supporting the people around us. Not, yeah, and sometimes people think local is best, it is in many ways because you're supporting the local economy. But, like, "organic" is best, honestly, because it's talking about taking care of the land, you know, and we have equity issues there. But that's why we've put in "fair trade" which is more about, like, the labor and also land in many cases, how we're using natural resources but more so the labor, that people are getting paid properly for this. So those labels are very important but there's relevant critique there, too, and I think we'll get into that in a moment. But are they environmentally and socially sustainable? I think that there are so many issues with the food system because it was created to function in this very unjust way. So people often say that the food system is broken, but it's not broken. It's working how it was meant to work and it's along the lines of capitalism, it is creating profits for a very small amount of people. And so I think my response to this question is to talk about the true cost of food which is a concept. I want to call it a movement but it's really academic at the moment, and it's the idea that there are many externalities - it's what they call it - within the food system. So if you go to the grocery store and you buy something cheap that doesn't reflect the true cost of it, then you are not actually paying for the environmental destruction that was tied to that product or the health impacts that that product will cause. And so getting towards the true cost of food would, yes, it would ultimately mean that our food is more expensive but other things, other basic needs are less, so we should have less health costs, we have less pollution and less environmental damage and so it's kind of just seeing where the costs are because they're there. They're just not being reflected in the price of food right now.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 16:00

Yeah. So you already mentioned that there are critics about those labels. I think that, for example, like, some farmers cannot afford the price of acquiring those labels for the production and there are also a lot of critics about processed food. Is it realistic to think that we could now enter in the world where there is no processed food, where there's no pesticides, where everything is kind of organic?

Samie Blasingame 16:34

Yeah, thanks for that question. So the first part about farmers not being able to afford the accreditation of "organic" or "Bio" here, you know, that's a real, real reality and it speaks to kind of the, should I say the commodification or, like, the capitalization of the food system, that they're priced out of that? And in the podcast and in general I speak about the importance of knowing your farmers when and if you can, and there's lots of privileges involved in being able to go meet a farmer. But at least in Berlin, we have farmers markets, you can talk to people and hear about them. There's plenty of farmers that I've met who don't have those accreditations but they're doing really good work on their farm and often we will find that, like, farmers are land stewards. They're incredibly smart people. They do so many different jobs all the time to manage a farm. They're not valued enough and many of them are land stewards taking care of

their land and if you talk to them, you hear that they don't have the ability to prove that through the standardized capitalist systems. So those labels should not matter as much as they do. It's just a way for consumers to understand but if we could talk to farmers and understand that way, that would be best. Now, the second part about processed food, yeah, processed food, like, that's been demonized as this idea of processed things, right? But it's important for people to remind themselves that food processing is a really important part of our food system, you know, like, we process so many things: milk, wine - I love wine - , you know, like, pasta...like, there's so many foods, so much food is processed in a way so it is more accessible to people, so it can be transported, so it can be preserved over time and those forms of processing are necessary. They've been practiced for millennia by many, many cultures. What is a problem is the global industrialized food system processing foods in order to keep shelf life or, like, to increase profit, right? Like, it's processed in a way that strips the food of their nutrients and that is not good. Yes, we should stay away from that as much as we can and there's some food justice ideas within that. I've seen many nutritions talk about the accessibility of certain foods and that's important, too. But it really goes back to, like, are we paying the right price for food in general in order to create a food system that gives us nutrients and also the land? And it's just...it's complex, as I said, but it's important to remember that not all processing is bad processing. And then the third part of your question, is it realistic to think that we could have a food system that has no processing, no pesticides and things like that? Yes, I do believe it's realistic. I think that the priorities and the political will is not there in order to support farmers or people who would like to be farmers in doing the type of agriculture that would allow for that. So there's, like, agroecology and, like, the interconnectedness of crops and the way that that produces a bounty of diversity on fields, as well as simultaneously, like, feeding the earth and the soil is a type of agriculture that's practiced on a smaller scale that could be way more better supported and funded all over the world and so I believe that we can feed the world that way, and many people do. "La Via Campesina", the movement for peasant farmers around the world, they believe that, too. Yeah, I do believe it. It's just that we're up against huge powers, corporate powers with lots of money and lots of, yeah, influence.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 20:47
In the context of cities worldwide that are becoming larger and larger, in the podcast you present us some practice where people are more in contact with food, for example urban farming or consumers run food cooperatives and supermarkets. Are those practices interesting hobbies or realistic solutions for cities' food supply?

Samie Blasingame 21:16
Yeah, I think there's so many things we need to be doing to correct the wrongs of the food system and I see urban farming and what was called community-supported agriculture - or here in Germany, they call it "Solawi", Solidarische Landwirtschaft - I see those two things as really great ideas, really great components to the overall food system and especially a more resilient local one. I used to work for a small hydroponics company here in Berlin and they use hydroponics to - which is like the growing of food

indoors with LED lights, that...there's lots of criticisms around that, right, because of the energy use - but this particular company sourced from wind farms up in the North. And I always thought of that as a nice compliment, you know, they're growing herbs and different leafy greens. They can't grow everything but I've always thought of it as kind of a compliment to our farmers and the people who are taking care of the land. So it alleviates a little bit of the land that needs to be used to grow those things that can be grown in those settings and people having herbs on their balconies and growing little things there, like, that just supplements the food system and ultimately, yeah, like I talked about in the podcast, it reconnects us to our food sources. Yeah, I think one of my favorite community questions on the podcast was, "What's your favorite vegetable and do you know how it grows?" and you'd be really surprised to know how many people don't know how things grow, me included. I'm a city kid, you know, like, I've had to watch many YouTube videos to figure out how things actually grew. And so, yeah, I think it's an important part of recognizing and remembering that food grows and it's life and someone put labor and effort into that.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 23:10
Yeah. In the podcast, also on, I mean, like, I googled you, I researched on your work and you use the term, for example, "circular design" or "ecosystem thinking". Could you explain what do they mean and also, why are they important in the current discourses on food and climate change?

Samie Blasingame 23:37
Yeah, sure. So I will give you my best definitions of these two terms. And when we say circular design, it's really related to our waste system because so often it's like: produce, consume, throw in the trash. So circular design tries to make it a circle instead of a linear system and so you're producing something, you consume it and you repurpose it or in the case of food, you would compost it or use these food scraps to create something else, you know, and just trying to create as little waste as possible. So that's circular design, and ecosystem thinking, the way I would define it is reminding ourselves that everything is connected, you know, like an action here affects an action there and it's just, we are all in an ecosystem together, especially when talking about decolonial ecologies, right? The core of that is that Western colonial binary thinking looks at men or women as separate from nature, but we are nature and we are part of an ecosystem. And so when I think about the food system and ecosystem thinking, I'm mostly thinking about logistics and how restaurants can team up together and collaborate to source from farmers, for example, so that it is not...the burden is not on any one entity, yeah, or logistics in terms of transportation within the city and making sure that 15 trucks aren't driving to the same location but we could, like, coordinate that in some way.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 25:35
In your podcast you also explain that there is a dramatic diminution, a loss of diversity in our food. For example, rice, wheat and corn alone make up 43% of all food eaten in the world. I mean, like, for example,

there are thousands of varieties of apples, but most of us know only three or five from our supermarkets. What's the implication of the constant loss of food diversity?

Samie Blasingame 26:09
Yeah, I just laughed in my head when you said that because I feel like Germany has so many apples in, like, the market but in the supermarket, you're so right, like, there's only a certain variety. And in general, this decrease of diversity on our fields and therefore in our supermarkets and on our plates has a huge impact on our health because we're not eating all the nutrients we possibly could. And also on the land, of course, you know, like, I hope by now everyone listening to this has recognized and heard how horrible monocultures are for our land. We can't be growing food like that, it's not sustainable and to diversify a field brings resilience because if a disease comes, different species are able to react to that disease differently so you don't lose a whole crop at the same time. That's why species diversity is so important on our fields. It's the same in our bodies, like you eating different types of grains and not just wheat and corn and rice all the time, it really will protect your immune system and people learned that a lot in the pandemic as well, like, eating a more diverse diet is super important. And people that are working on this in the world are often part of seed saving movements, the push against the global industrial food system that is trying to patent certain seeds. I mean, there should be no reason why it's illegal to reproduce a seed. It's something that we have done for millennia to save seeds and reproduce them every season or grow them again every season. So seed saving movements around the world are some of the most important push backs on this lack of diversity.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 27:57
Yeah. I'm like, we, I'm like, the podcast series, it's about colonial ecology. Today, we're more talking specifically on food. I mean, like, for example, like here in Germany, in the Global North in general, we have a lot of food, you know, daily life that are actually, like, not from here. I'm thinking about coffee, sugar, cocoa, tea, spices, fruit as banana. Those foods are very accessible at very low prices and consumed in huge amounts, for example, here in Germany. But they're not grown, they are not from here. How did we arrive in such a situation and what are the human and environmental costs of this situation?

Samie Blasingame 28:49
Yeah, so in many of the spaces that I work in and the people that I work with, we try to constantly remind people that the beginning of colonialism in 1492 also marks the beginning of processes that led to large scale greenhouse gas emissions and that's mostly from forests being cleared for industrial agriculture, plantations and mineral extractions. And this involves the fact that people and ecosystems in the Global South were being exploited and that has only continued within our global food system. I was talking about these major multinational corporations, food corporations that control our food system or much of it. And, yeah, that is, you see that now, right? I think as you were asking that question, I was also reflecting on this idea of local and global again, like, local food systems are important because they support humans

and labor around us and yeah, it's nice to support people in your community. But the transportation of food is a very small part of the emissions that come from the food system and so I don't advocate for not eating things from elsewhere. What's important when we eat things from elsewhere is that we pay attention to how the land was used because that's the biggest issue, like, whether you're eating locally or something that's grown somewhere else. It's important how the land was managed in order to produce that. Of course, we should be avoiding things that are flown in because air emissions, air traffic emissions are a big part of climate change. But I don't think that means we shouldn't eat anything that comes from other places and we are in a global food system that many people in poor economies are dependent on. So if we, just all of a sudden, would say, "We're not going to eat those, not going to buy those", what would the repercussions of that be? And I think that's important to recognize, like, we can't...it's not a quick, easy change, there's no one solid answer. Of course, be conscious about the food that you're buying and where it comes from and you know, you can see that in the grocery store. But it's not a clear answer, unfortunately.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 31:13
Yeah. I think that we also talked about, when we're preparing the podcast, that what is important is, like, who is earning the money? And most of the time, so people who grow the food in the Global South grow products that are being processed in the Global North, meaning that most of the money is made in the North and the added value is made in the Global North where the products are also sold.

Samie Blasingame 31:50
Yeah, yeah, and my apologies for not including that in that. When I say care about the land, who's working the land, that's people. And so every time we talk about, like, land and, like, land protection, like, we're talking about humans, too. So that's one but yes, that is a big, big issue, especially with major products like coffee and cacao or something. It is a horrible reality that many countries who produce most of those things don't have a culture there for coffee or for chocolate eating, you know, and I think I don't have a solid answer for it but I think that we need to be conscious about and do our due diligence to find companies who are really in collaboration with these partners and the more we can do to buy directly from them, I think the better.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 32:52
Yeah. I think that here I would like to make a connection to the second big topic I wanted to address with you in the podcast which is climate and environmental justice. I think that we understood that there's a continuity of colonial power within the global food system but also in the discussion around environmental crisis. And could you please define for us: What is climate and environmental justice, and how did you become sensitive to this topic?

Samie Blasingame 33:32

Sure. So I'll start with environmental justice because that is a term born out of the environmental racism movement in the US and it's very tied to, like, pollution in someone's backyard, you know, being dumped on and left to deal with the emissions of a factory nearby or something. And so environmental justice really is the recognition that we all deserve and have a right to a clean environment. And there's certain groups in society, poor, Black, migrant background societies or communities within our society that are often not protected when it comes to that and so the justice element is recognizing that there's an uneven field there or uneven experience. When we talk about climate and environmental justice, we try to make it clear that it's always connected to humans, as well, because that debate kind of gets a little heady, a little theory-based and you forget that you're talking about livelihoods and people. So it's always important to talk about, like I said before, land and humans together. And now climate justice is similar but I think it's important for climate justice to be way more expanded than it is now, and one of the projects I'm involved in is to expand the concept of climate justice within the minds of major funders in Europe because when they say they're funding climate justice, they're funding very, like, tangible environmental projects. But climate justice is much more than that. Climate justice is how we're feeding people, how we're housing people, how we're educating people, how we are providing dignified work for people to contribute to society. All of that would allow for us to have a lesser impact on the world and therefore, address climate and the CO2 emissions that are very heavy again and very technical. But when it comes down to people's lives, we're talking about our basic needs and that's what climate justice is.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 35:47

You already mentioned a little bit, like, the issue of pollution. But could you give us more example of climate and environmental injustice, racism, discrimination?

Samie Blasingame 36:00

Yeah, I can and I want to include an example that I wanted to say earlier, but...so I'll say two. So one is the global food system and the way that, for example, grains are moving around the world. So you may not know but wheat - it's a crazy fact to me that wheat is traded on the international stock market, you know, and that the grains are talked about in this very capitalist way - and so one example that might fit here is the fact that grains from Northern countries have often, in many cases, flooded the markets of so called “developing” economies. And that is super unjust because those places have abundance of resources that could be used and support their local economies but instead are being flooded by things from the Global North. In the pandemic we saw - because there were blockages in moving things - we saw people in places like Senegal, for example, because Deutsche Welle did a special on this about wheat from Europe flooding their markets using different products to create flour like Cassava. And there's so many examples of local products in the African continent that could be used in different ways, but they're not promoted because they have no connection to profit within the global food system and that's something to pay attention to. A second example I can give you is about migrant rights. Of course, you know, Europe

talks about this migrant crisis which in itself to call that a crisis when it is a manmade issue, climate change but also economic policies, trade policies that make people need to find better livelihoods elsewhere. That's a huge example of this and that they seek out better life and we block them like, "No, you can't come here, now that we've completely devastated what you know to be your life". Yeah, that's a huge example of this. I learned recently that much of the development aid that is normally used for so called development projects - which I can critique also - has been repurposed for domestic security and I think that speaks a lot to, like, how we think about global collaboration and, yeah, our impact on the world and here in the Global North.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 38:28
Yeah. So with your work, you aim at revealing and also balancing those injustices. Your work is very community-focused. You host, or you hosted a monthly meetup in Berlin called "Food in the City" and you regularly host workshops on climate and environmental justice. How do you introduce people to those very complex topics?

Samie Blasingame 38:57
Yeah, that's a great question because they are complex, sometimes heavy topics, and the "Food in the City" meetups as well as, like, the workshops I do, those have tended to be with people who are already a little interested in the topic and so I'm not starting from ground zero. But with "Food in my Kiez", my podcast, I tried to bring these topics up to people on the street so, like, you'll hear community voices and I spent so many hours producing that podcast which were just me talking to people on the street, like, they maybe didn't want to be recorded or they didn't really know, like, what I was doing yet, but I would explain to them certain things, explain to them what is Solawi, community support agriculture processes and I think I start with seeing where they're at, like, where they're at and how they're thinking about it and what they bring up first. And I mean, my workshops are very reflective, it's very asking people to, like, what's on your mind, what do you need to get out and talk about as a space to start a conversation? So I guess that would be my answer. You have to meet people where they're at, you have to, you know, engage what understandings they have, what associations they have at all and then build up on it. And, yeah, I tend to be a very big picture person. So I throw a lot in to people who join my workshops but I also give them a lot of space to digest it. I try to, at least.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 40:33
I mean, I think that this reminds me of belle hooks who always said that when you are trying to, or when you are working on deconstructing systems of oppression, you always have to take people where they are and not where you wish them to be. So I think it's a very loving and it's also probably the most efficient way of doing it.

Samie Blasingame 40:56
Yeah, I don't know another way to do it, right? Otherwise you will be met with resistance and they probably won't ever come back to considering that because they had such a bad experience in the first place.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 41:27
You are a very educated person…

Samie Blasingame 41:29
"Very" (laughs). Thanks.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 41:32
…you have a master in Environmental Policy and Planning from the Freie University of Berlin. Universities are places of knowledge production, knowledge transmission and where the next generation of environmental experts are being trained. Western ecology and environmental knowledge is presented as universal and objective. Also, we know that it has been built on colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, Eurocentrism and heteronormativity. Also, knowing that the current global climate and social crises are a direct result of this system of oppression, I would like to know more about your, like, your study. How inclusive or not from feminist queer, Black, Brown and Indigenous Global South perspective was the content of this academic program? And how would you decolonize academic degrees to make them more efficient at facing and solving the current and future global challenges?

Samie Blasingame 42:48
Wow, what a question (laughs). First off, the reason I laughed before you said I was very educated was because I never wanted to go to college, and thank goodness for my mother for pushing me to do that. And when I did my first undergraduate course in Long Beach where I studied, I had an incredible teacher who inspired me and she inspired me to go see more of the world as well, and so I studied environmental studies and got out and tried to learn Spanish and whatever and so that led me to where I'm at now. And I came to Berlin for this master's program, and so part of the laugh was also that that master's program was really not great. It was really, yeah, underwhelming and it ended up actually stopping. We were the last class to graduate because it was so mismanaged and disorganized and when you asked me, like, were there queer feminist, like, Black people involved? Absolutely not. Like, when I reflect on that now, like, no, there weren't. And so my program was a joint program between the TU and FU, and the TU classes were better, they were. And recently, there was a decolonial conference, I think, that the BiPOC for Future folks did at the TU and a friend of mine gave a discussion on, or a lecture on ecology and the study of ecology as a very colonial process or a colonial manifestation. And I was not there but I heard later that afterwards, a professor who had joined the lecture wrote a very long email, like, criticizing their whole approach and basically saying, like, "You're wrong because environmentalism has nothing to do with

humans" or something, like, they totally reinforced that binary that I was speaking about earlier, you know? So, and that ended up being a professor that taught me landscape planning. So, like, clearly, the consciousness of all of this is not there. And how to change it? There was a second part or...?

Aouefa Amoussouvi 44:59
Yes, how to change, meaning for me, how to decolonize the university and academic degree?

Samie Blasingame 45:07
Yeah, I think it starts with a lot of reflecting on these concepts and, like, recognizing the origins of it, you know, like I said, I have a lot of critiques on development, the same thing in the development sector, like, why development is...development is carrying on the legacy of colonialism. Colonialism never ended. It was just transformed into this development aid, right? And if you really understood the history of that, the way that you maneuver in development work would be completely different and that's very important for people to recognize. I think the same for these institutions, you know, like...and integrating that into the conversation. I mean, I don't remember seeing or having any professors from other places when I was there.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 46:03
Yeah. Yeah, which is, I think, a huge problem because the current crises are global phenomena and so we also need, like, global perspective and global cooperation to face them.

Samie Blasingame 46:19
100 percent agree.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 46:21
Yeah, we are coming to, slowly to the end of the podcast. I still have a few questions. One which is about...so besides the individual and citizen actions, the climate and environmental transition needs institutions like universities, the Humboldt Forum which hosts this podcast series, governments, as well as national and international policies, making organization to be more actively taking responsibility as well as taking action to deconstruct the colonial heritage of the current system. Do you think that those institutions, public or private, are doing enough?

Samie Blasingame 47:10
Are they doing enough? I think as someone who is... who defines themselves as an activist and is part of these different spaces, of course I can't say they're doing enough. Do I know that the individuals within those institutions - because institutions are made up of individuals, right - so, do I know that some of them are questioning things and pushing things as much as they can within the structures that they're confined by? Yes, I know that that's happening. But I think, yeah, I think institutions need to - especially

publicly funded ones like this, like the Humboldt Forum - need to be better at educating the public about the complexities of what we're talking about and the histories that we're talking about. And again, on the point of institutions being made up of individuals, a lot of this work...when I'm giving, like, environmental racism workshops or talking about decoloniality - that starts within us, you know, like, we are all colonized because it was such a widespread thing. White supremacy is global and it's in everybody because it is a culture. White culture is in everyone and so fighting against that and recognizing the ways it shows up in you is really the first step of that and hopefully, individuals within an institution can team up and start to create those movements within it. I love talking about movements, you know, I think it's really important to recognize that you are not alone because there's people that are thinking like this as well. And if you don't feel an issue in an institution, you need to start poking around because you'll feel that way. Yeah, and when it comes to the Humboldt Forum, I mean, what are they doing? I don't know, I have not been super on top of the conversation as much as I'd like to, but I know that the protest and criticism of them continue and, you know, I checked to see, like, what is the stance on this? So I checked the website on what they're saying about colonialism and coloniality. There's a whole page on it with statements from, like, the CEO or whatever. Yeah, and a lot of that is talking about, like, reflections and conversations and I think those are things that individuals need to be doing, but the institution as a whole needs to be doing more.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 49:37
Actions.

Samie Blasingame 49:38
Actions, yeah. We need to be getting somewhere and ultimately, the criticism of the Humboldt Forum is to return things that were stolen, and that's not mentioned at all on that page. I was...yeah, I just think we can't always talk about things. We need to do them, as well, and I don't see any of that connection so far.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 50:00
I have four, five questions that I'm asking all guests for ending questions. So the Western knowledge production narrative creates isolated genius characters who seem to come up alone with great ideas. To highlight the continuity and collectivity of knowledge production, I ask all guests of the podcast to give us the name of someone who influenced and inspired their work.

Samie Blasingame 50:31
Yeah, so I gave some thought to this but it's something I've been reflecting on myself because I'm not sure if I really have solid idols like that, like, of course, there's been individuals who have inspired me and who are popular in popular culture and have inspired me, of course. But I think I refrain from saying, like, this is an idol of mine or someone I really focus on because so many people have. So in general, I would say

community. Community inspires me. People on the street inspire me. People just doing what they can with what they have inspired me more than any person who's been celebrated in that way, yeah.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 51:14
Could you recommend one concrete action that people could do today to enact decolonial ecology?

Samie Blasingame 51:22
Yeah, and I think I actually already mentioned it at some point, but I think what you can do is remind yourself that you are nature and you don't need to go out to nature, although that is lovely, too, if you live in a city. But you are nature and we are all connected.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 51:39
What are you working on at this moment?

Samie Blasingame 51:41
I'm actually working on a new podcast project which does not have to do with food. It has to do with feminist development policy and it's with the Heinrich Böll Stiftung and a smaller org called "Fair Share of Women Leaders". It is a five episode series, we are producing the third one so you can already listen to two of them and it's really critiquing the German government's focus on feminist development policy now, like, what will that be? What does it mean to be feminist in development policy when the origins are, as I was saying, colonial in nature? So yeah, have a listen. I hope you enjoy it.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 52:20
Do you have anything to add to our today's conversation?

Samie Blasingame 52:26
I think we can talk about the food system and justice within that, decolonial justice within that for a very, very long time, but I think you asked good questions and I enjoyed being here.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 52:42
And you have good answers.

Samie Blasingame 52:44
Oh, good, I hope so. I hope so. So, yeah, it was...I don't think so, I don't have anything to add at the moment.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 52:50
Okay. So the very, very last question: Where can our listeners follow you and find more information about your projects?

Samie Blasingame 52:57
Yeah, you can check me out on my website, samieblasingame.com and also on LinkedIn. I rarely post on Twitter and don't have a public facing Instagram but I will be better about updating my website and LinkedIn with the projects I'm working on.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 53:15
We will also add the link to "Food in my Kiez" podcast and also the link to the feminist development policy podcast.

Samie Blasingame 53:25
Yeah, good. Cool.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 53:28
So yeah, Samie, we, myself and the team of the podcast are just, like, very, very glad and very honored to have you today for the conversation. Thank you again for your time!

Samie Blasingame 53:43
Thank you again! Thank you, thank you and for all the space outside of the podcast to talk about the reality of what we're doing and yeah, who we're part of by bringing this through this platform. So, thank you.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 53:58
Bye!

Samie Blasingame 53:59
Bye.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 54:01
Concept, research and moderation are made by me, Aouefa Amoussouvi. Sound production: Annelien Van Heymbeeck. Thank you to Sias Wöbling and Lucile Bouvard for ideas and exchanges. Thank you to Julia Richard and Alondra Meier for the assistance and Michael Dieminger for the invitation. This podcast series is commissioned by 99 Questions at the Humboldt Forum.

SHOW NOTES – Episode 2

Samie Blasingame:

https://samieblasingame.com/

Podcast "Food in my Kiez":

https://foodinmykiez.com/

Podcast "Feminist Development Policy: A Pathway Towards Feminist Global Collaboration":

https://fairsharewl.org/podcast-a-pathway-towards-feminist-global-collaboration/

"Food in the City" Meetup:

https://www.meetup.com/de-DE/food-in-the-city/

Movement "La Via Campesina":

https://viacampesina.org/en/

Netzwerk Solidarische Landwirtschaft (Solawi):

https://www.solidarische-landwirtschaft.org/startseite

Agroecology:

https://www.soilassociation.org/causes-campaigns/a-ten-year-transition-to-agroecology/what-is-agroecology/

Abbreviations:

TU: Technische Universität Berlin

FU: Freie Universität Berlin

EPISODE 3.1 - Pseudo-Objective Scientific Language and Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals with Dr. Alexis Pauline Gumbs

Synopsis

In this two-part episode our guest is Dr. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, queer Black feminist writer, scholar and activist with whom we dive into her most recent book “Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals”. Where lies the interconnection between marine mammals and Black feminism? What does the queerness of marine mammals look like? What can we as humans learn from marine mammals, their skills, qualities and ways of life? We also discuss how Eurocentrism, patriarchy, capitalism and heteronormativity might be present in the making of scientific knowledge which claims to be objective and universal. Besides, we explore the impact the Western scientific language might have on justifying an extractive relationship with the planet as well as with the human and non-human living beings we share it with. Lastly, Alexis talks with us about the practice and power of breathing consciously.

Speakers

Dr. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Dr. Aouefa Amoussouvi

Aouefa Amoussouvi 00:33

Welcome to the *Decolonial Ecologies* podcast series, a podcast series in which we talk about the history of ecology, how it became a scientific academic field interconnected with systems of power and oppression. Colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, Eurocentrism and heteronormativity have been applied to produce ecological knowledge that claims to be universal and objective. Therefore, museums and universities have contributed to shape and justify an extractive way of inhabiting the earth. In each episode, you will hear a researcher, an activist or an artist who challenges the Western mainstream narrative on ecology with intersectional feminist and queer perspectives, perspectives from Black, Indigenous and People of Color. We will discuss decolonial practices in both the Global South and the Global North to more ethically respond to the current climate and social crises. Besides individual and citizen actions, we will also take a look at the responsibility of museums and universities to deconstruct the colonial heritage of their own structures. For example, we will discuss how restitution of colonial artifacts by museums can be seen as a part of the climate and environmental justice agenda. I'm Aouefa Amoussouvi, I'm your host for this podcast series. In this episode, our guest is Dr. Alexis Pauline Gumbs. Dr. Alexis Pauline Gumbs is an American writer, scholar, activist and educator. She's the author of several books including "Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals". So, we are starting?

Annelien Van Heymbeeck 02:49

Yes.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 02:50
Okay, yeah. I'm also hearing something.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 03:03
Oh, it's raining here. Can you hear that?

Aouefa Amoussouvi 03:08
Yeah, it's nice but I was also listening this and I was like, "Is she listening to whales?" (laughs)

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 03:17
Always, always, but in this case the water came to me. (laughs)

Aouefa Amoussouvi 03:23
Great. (laughs)

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 03:27
Yeah, we have a storm here. It's gonna rain all day. So, yeah.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 03:34
Yeah, Alexis, thank you so much for being our guest. I'm very - and as well the entire team - is very, very honored to have you today for not only one episode but two because we have just a lot to talk about, going from trade, slavery, colonialism but also fierceness and pride and yeah, and queerness and so many different topics. So yeah, let's dive in.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 04:09
Let's do it, let's do it! There is so much to talk about.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 04:13
Yeah. To start, I'm like, you have written many books and done a lot but today, I would like to discuss with you your most recent book "Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals". It's part of adrienne maree brown's "Emergent Strategy" series, and with this book you have won the 2022 Whiting Award in “Nonfiction”. I'm also very excited that the book has been translated into German and it's available since yesterday under the title "Unertrunken" with a beautiful cover by the Berlin based Italo-Nigerian artist Diana Ejaita. So, my first question to start is: Could you please explain us what made you become so interested and even passionate about marine mammals? I know that the book was not planned to be a book and so I would like to have a bit more detail how the project started and how it's evolved into what it is today.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 05:27

Yeah, thank you for that. Well, similarly to everything I do, usually I'm not planning for it to be a book necessarily, right? So, I'm doing what I need to do spiritually, emotionally, creatively for myself as part of my process and so I started listening to whale sounds just as part of my meditation and as a peace practice for myself. And it was at a time where I was experiencing a lot of emotions that I wasn't familiar with or maybe I just had...was no longer able to repress some emotions that had always been there. But when my father passed away I just had this overwhelming grief and so now, looking back, I can see, like, it did almost feel like I was drowning in that grief. And as I'm, you know, listening to the whales and trying to find my peace, I was realizing, you know, whales and all marine mammals, they're surrounded in water most of the time and they're not drowning, right? They're breathing and they're living their best lives, except for some of the unfortunate environmental obstacles that we have created. And so I thought, you know, I would like to feel that way. I would like to feel that I could be in my emotions, fully immersed in them maybe but still breathing and not feeling like I was going to be drowned by them. And...so that's how it started and so I just was like, you know, it would make sense for me to learn more about marine mammals. I started to read more and to research and yeah...it was a powerful process and in that process, I started to see - and I know this links to some things that we might talk about later - but I started to see some of the parallels between how this research about marine mammals is written and the racist language of colonialism and how it's, like, it's the same language. In fact, it is the same process that is continuing to harm marine mammals and it's continuing to harm me, right? So that's how I started to see that my practice as a Black feminist scholar and artist and my practice of just wanting to know more about marine mammals was really connected. And it's connected through those lines of oppression but it also felt connected in the sense that the work I'm doing looks at transatlantic slave trade and it is the same ships that also were used to hunt the whales. It really is, you know...I'm living in a country that has its foundation on the stolen labor of people kidnapped from Africa and the oil, the initial oil trade which was a trade in the blubber of whales, and so I started to see that. And I always see this, sometimes things that I think are separate, they're not separate and...yeah, so that's really how it started and then I got to a point, I mean, I was writing for months and months and it really was just my own process. And then there was this one post, well, it became a post. It was just one day that I was writing and I was like, you know, this is probably something other people might want to know. Other people might want to know about how the hooded seal gets enough milk from their mother in three days that they could travel over the whole world and they have what they need, like, I needed to know that that day but I was, like, maybe somebody else out here needs to know. And I posted on Facebook, and maybe just Facebook, maybe Facebook and Instagram, I don't even remember. And after that day, the next day, what I wrote, I was like, oh, this isn't just...I realized this isn't just for me at this point. I got to a point in my process where I was like, okay, this is actually for us, and by us, I just meant my own social media connections, right? Like, whoever that community is for me and it just kept going and it continued to be a daily practice but then it became a shared daily practice, and then people were just like, well, we need this as a book. And so that's why it's a

book. It's really because at a certain point, it started to belong not just to my practice but to my community. And I feel very accountable to that.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 10:41
Yeah. Yeah, the subtitle of "Undrowned" is "Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals" and you already talked a bit about it but I would like you to tell us a bit more. What is the link and what are the parallels between marine mammals and Black feminist or Black feminism? Yeah.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 11:11
Yeah, I mean I think that what makes them Black feminist lessons is that Black feminism is all about interconnection, right? So Black feminism is a political imperative. It is an ethic. It is an intellectual framework. For me, it's also a spiritual practice that says that we are simultaneously all that we are and we are facing multiple oppressions as who we are, right? That really is the genesis of Black feminism in the tradition of Black feminism that I follow and really am created by, especially in my life as a scholar and an artist. And so these lessons from marine mammals are Black feminist in the sense that the same thing is happening, right? It's this realization that it's...these things could be thought of as parallel, right? And so some of these Black feminists in the late 60s and early 70s have talked about being so frustrated, coming out of the civil rights movement and Black power movement and women's movement in the US, and people being like, well, are you Black first or are you a woman first? And obviously, experientially, those things cannot be separated but also the system that we live in con- (loud signal in the background) Oh, that's a tornado warning.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 12:54
Really?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 12:56
Sorry! You know, my phone's on silent but the only thing that comes through are, like, tornado warnings.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 13:01
Are you safe? Or do you have to...

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 13:04
No, I'm safe. It's uhm...yeah, I think it will be fine. I don't know, it really is saying not tornado watch but tornado warning. It's like, "Take shelter now in a basement".

Aouefa Amoussouvi 13:26
I think we should...put yourself...

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 13:28
Yeah, maybe we should pause. Okay, okay. Alright, I'll be back, bye.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 13:38
Okay, this is very unexpected.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 13:41
I know, has a tornado ever happened during a podcast taping for you before?

Aouefa Amoussouvi 13:48
So, we had a short break, yeah, because there was a tornado and now, yeah, I'm like, you are safe. I think that was the most important for us, that you could go to a safe space for something like twenty minutes of the tornado. But we should say that the sky is now clear, the sun is shining. Yeah, so we will continue our discussion.

Annelien Van Heymbeeck 14:24
Does it happen often?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 14:25
Do tornadoes happen often here?

Annelien Van Heymbeeck 14:26
Yeah.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 14:31
Um, I wouldn't say that often. I mean, when there's a severe thunderstorm, there's always the possibility but I don't think that where we live. There've been actually a lot of hurricanes, I mean, a lot. Well, they've been hurricanes but we're not that close to the shore, there haven't been a lot of tornadoes that have landed. So maybe it's a very special thing, you know, Audre Lorde's connection to the deity Oya who is the energy of the whirlwind Maybe she's very excited that we're gonna be having this conversation. I don't know. (laughs)

Aouefa Amoussouvi 15:09
Yeah. Yeah, my next question is about the writing of your book. "Undrowned" is a meditation, a poem, a love letter. It's a guide. It's a personal story and how you write the book, you switch from addressing the reader, talking to the marine mammals, talking to your ancestor, to the next generation. Sometimes it's also the marine mammal that is talking to us. But it's also full of scientific facts. It's not a traditional scientific essay and you write already in the introduction of the book about the violence, of the pseudo-

neutral, objective scientific language. So, could you tell us more about this kind of language and yeah, and why is it so violent?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 16:12

Yeah, I think that the violence really comes from anytime that we impose a separation that's actually not a real separation, right? So we talked about that a little bit earlier in terms of how Black feminism actually has come in response to false separation that is imposed, right, if you believe that we are separate. And so, in the scientific literature about marine mammals…first of all, is just this idea that they're separate from the scientists who are observing them. Even the idea that the ocean itself is separate from us in our species, none of those things are actually true. If that separation is used not to be, like, "Well, let me have some perspective", or, you know, what are the differences that, you know, what's the creative power of our differences, as Audre Lorde would say…but are instead used to say it actually is okay for us to pollute the ocean, it actually is fine for us to hold marine mammals captive for entertainment. It's, you know, all of those things, or to hunt them and, you know, kill them into near extinction, right? So, the violence is ultimately that capacity that when we tell a story that justifies our harmful behaviors and we say we're not harming ourselves, we're just harming this or we're not even doing any harm because the separation is so complete, that there's no harm possible. What we actually are doing is we're harming. We're harming everyone and we're harming ourselves, even by the fact of believing that we're so profoundly disconnected, we actually have cut ourselves off from what it might mean to be in right relationship with this planet where we live. So that's really at the core of the violence. I would say the ways that it shows up are, you know, in instances of what captivity looks like, what tracking looks like of marine mammals. It also comes in through these assumptions, you know, that there's this and we know that this is not only the case with marine mammals but has been a tradition in the ways that other species get described by scientists or by curators of natural history museums and, you know, all of these spaces, as if the idea that we want to impose, let's say, like, heteronormativity or, like, the nuclear family, we want to impose that on our species. And so we're like, "Oh, it's reflected, it's reflected in other species", and, you know, it's not. And the thing about marine mammals is that it is so difficult to really observe them that almost…I mean, a huge percentage of what I was reading when I was researching and trying to learn about, actually, what is marine mammal behavior, was conjecture. And it just seemed too convenient to me that that conjecture always was, like, well, there's a gender binary and we, you know, we can make a lot of assumptions about genitalia even on beaked whales that swim so deep that scientists never have actually seen what that looks like, you know? There's this narrative that is pushing that forward and it's the same narrative that is at the root of all these interlocking systems of oppression that I look at as a Black feminist, right? So that's the connection, the ultimate end or impact of that violence is the complete destruction of our relationship with this planet. That's the direction that all of this violence is going in and…yeah, so that's how I would describe the violence.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 20:52
Yeah, I think that you already talked about a little bit about the heteronormativity that is applied on the marine mammals but on...also on plants and any kind of animals in a way to, I'm like, with this lens, we try to see the world and apply this. But it's also used as a justification to see this as a norm in humans and in our society. I know that there is one short text that maybe you could read if it's okay for you. I will tell you the page and it's about dolphins and dolphin couples. One second...

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 21:53
Out in the ocean it is not considered queer for bottlenose dolphins assigned male by scientists to live in bonded pairs for decades, whole lifetimes. It is common. It is not considered queer for groups of bottlenose dolphins that scientists call "related females" to travel the whole world together for always. It is common. And these are the lives of the most "common" dolphins. The archetypical dolphins. Flipper in them. As a species that is hardly consistent about anything (they eat whatever, they live wherever, they give birth anytime, their skin could be dark or light, they show up in all different sizes), they consistently remember each other. They have the longest social memory of anyone we've noticed; they know each other's whistles after decades apart. So we could call who they stay with an active commitment. Often a "same sex" commitment. In captivity? Well that's something else. All my love to the queers claiming ocean on land. To the brave ones here salting the rest of Earth by building our uncommon lives around each other. We feel buoyant on illegal terms. We prioritize each other over the gravity of socially enforced narratives, laws and tax structures. We act on the knowledge that everything could change and yet if I was choosing I would choose you again. We will all be marine mammals soon. So thank you for remembering to swim despite everything.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 24:12
Can you tell us, how queer are marine mammals?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 24:16
I think some of the queerness of marine mammals is...I mean, and this is the thing, I think that my definition of queerness of course is very expansive and basically everything that's not inside of that very rigid heteronormative, nuclear family reproducing construct is queer. And so even just connecting with marine mammals in that particular way could be queer. But we see all sorts of things, right? We do see forms of companionship, we do see dolphins that, you know, swim the whole ocean with other dolphins that, they say, have, like, similar genitalia. So what does that mean? It doesn't necessarily mean much, except that that's just something that occurs in the natural world and it's something that, of course, also occurs in our world. And there's family making, right? There's pods, there's scale of care that are not in the forms that are imposed in a human society. So there's that, but then there's also just, like, for me, the queerest thing is how marine mammals continue to evade our desire to even understand them. They evade scientific observation quite well. They evade patterns and normativity that people have tried to impose

on them. They evade me in my understanding, right? I think what I approach over and over again and what makes this a series of meditations and not a traditional academic explanation of the connection between Black feminism and marine mammal life, for example, is that I just come to wonder. I wonder. At the end of the day, you know, I have this idea, like, well, maybe I could immerse myself in learning more about marine mammals because I'm trying to...I'm trying to breathe, you know, an unbreathable context. And I still wonder how they do it with so much grace. It's not to say I learned nothing. But it's the wonder that actually moves me into relating to my breath and my body and all of us in a different way. And I think that that's the queer thing, is that there's so much possibility, there's so much that's unknown and that's the energy of queerness that I'm talking about which is that, you know, June Jordan said, "If you are free, you are not predictable", right? She has an essay called "A New Politics of Sexuality" where she talks about that. And I see that as an ancestor to the way that I understand queerness which is that you don't know, right? Love is transforming us. The possibility of connecting is transforming us and that is disruptive, of course, to a system that says, "But we have to know" and, you know, our relationships have to be contractual and they have to reproduce this particular form. And they have to reproduce the state in this particular way. You know, all of those things are disrupted by what I would say is just the reality that we really don't know what's going to happen. And that's the good news. That's the good news.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 27:52
Yeah, I think that also in the language of scientific books...you also give many examples: You say that about the impossibility of predict the food behavior of marine mammals, you also say that some of them are described, for example, about the winged whale, it says that it's a species that may suddenly appear alongside you without warning.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 28:23
Yeah, I love that. That's what it says in the guidebook. I love that.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 28:30
And then it also say it then may vanish without a trace. And there's a lot of words that are not neutral at all but full of interpretation and meaning, surely, like also negative interpretation and connotation because the animal doesn't follow the rule that the scientists want. If the animal doesn't come closer, it's not social enough. There's also a part where you describe, I think, it's about the Hawaiian monk seal that almost disappeared. But slowly, so population is being regrown, scientific text says that it appeared to be intolerant of human presence. And when we think about, it's totally absurd to think that this animal are tolerant or even curious in us. And yeah, why should they? Why should they be? They have lived before us and they might actually stay after us.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 29:50
They might.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 29:52
So they don't…they don't need us.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 29:56
No, they don't. I mean, in fact, the things that humans build and the ways that they have interacted with seals, just as one example or with the Hawaiian monk seal in particular, have been harmful, right? So, not only could it be possible that, as not part of their direct cycle of living, that we would be just completely irrelevant to them. Moreso, it's that the tendencies of how we've been behaving over these past centuries are harmful. There's very good reasons to avoid us. And at the same time we are fundamentally connected, you know? So I think that, like, both of those things are true at the same time. There's something you said earlier, though…oh, and I want to also say, you know, so with those phrases that you pointed out, like, it may suddenly appear beside you without warning and it can vanish without a trace. And you know, there's some, like, criminalization and, you know, like, there's fear in some of that language. And I think that there's also longing, you know, and I know I'm actually speaking to a scientist because you're a scientist right, yourself, and I think that I don't want… understanding that the scientific language is violent, to me it's not the same thing as saying that scientists or marine scientists are violent or that they're studying marine mammals for violent reasons, right? I think there is…I think there must be a sincere longing that's related to, even though it's different methodologically from the longing that I feel, right, like, oh, it disappeared without a trace, you know? Like they really want to see, right, but I mean we're talking about - in terms of marine scientists - people who do extreme things. They go to Antarctica, they are out on the water, you know, threat of dehydration, just hoping to witness a marine mammal. They must be in love, you know, say like, who does that if they're not feeling, like, a deep longing? You would just do something else, you know? And so, I don't want to separate myself from marine scientists and obviously I wouldn't even be able to be reflecting on what I'm reflecting on without the work to observe that so many people have done. It's just that, like me, working in a language, a colonial language like English, even writing this book, they are also working in a colonial language of thought in science. And so I want us to be partners and unlearning that and I see "Undrowned", this book, as part of that practice of saying, like, okay, what are other ways that could free us from this? I think you spoke about this, about the false objectivity, that the science is the pretense of the sciences since the enlightenment period, that maybe there is another way to learn without these distinctions which, as you mentioned before, I'm really blurring in this book, of who is speaking? Where do I start? Where does the marine mammal end? Is this our collective? Is it, you know, all the directions of curiosity that are possible instead of this false objectivity as if whoever is writing up these reports, whoever is out here on these boats, whoever is, you know, monitoring the shoreline at all times as if they are not changing, as if they are not having an experience of desire, as if they are not also trying to breathe.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 34:10
Yeah. Oh, I could just thank you at the end of each of your sentences. (laughs)

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 34:18
(laughs) Thank you.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 34:20
Yeah, I think that I wanted to also mention…you also mentioned the colonialism, I mean, like, the coloniality and the link of this language. And I know that in the book you also say that talking about the different locations and habitats of the marine mammals, some of the books are still using words like "Old World", referring to Americas and the Caribbean and Hawaii. And "Old World", referring to Europe and the sea and ocean of the European continent which is…there's no excuse.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 35:11
At this point, yes. And I will say - because it's not like I was looking at archival guidebooks, you know -, like my starting point were, like, 2019 editions of, you know, Smithsonian Guidebook, Audubon Guidebook, those kind of, like, dominant guidebooks which of course are connected to colonial institutions. So…

Aouefa Amoussouvi 35:41
Yeah, and can you tell us more about, I'm like, the parallel between the…I'm like, the research but also the decline of population of marine mammals and colonialism?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 35:57
Oh, yeah, there's so many instances. I mean there's the fact that, as part of this idea, right, of a "New World", European companies came to hunt fur to bring back to Europe for people who wanted to wear fur coats, they obviously…they're killing so many animals that have fur, land mammals. But also, they would hunt marine mammals and eat them on the journey. This is the way that, as I say, our large vegetarian or manatee ancestor went extinct and was the first marine mammal to go extinct from human contact. There is the very direct oil industry that I mentioned earlier that use the blubber of whales to make all the lamps, to make all the light, to make the thread, to make the, like, all the things that…all the things that allowed the colonial project to actually happen, right, like the light by which they were writing these shady treaties to steal the land from Indigenous people, they were writing it by whale oil lamps, right, like, that…that's…it's all, it's, like, up in there. And in terms of the blubber of the Caribbean monk seal, which is ostensibly completely extinct, the machinery of the processing of sugarcane in the Caribbean, they were using the blubber of the monk seals that lived on the islands and in particular thinking about Haiti and Hispaniola as that first place of encounter and the first place where that process started. So I mean, there's so many examples and it's not to say that marine mammals are unique because, of course, every aspect of the natural world has been harmed by the colonial project. And that's actually inherent in the colonial project, right? It's an extractive project, it enforces and seeks to amplify and increase a separation between our species and the entire world. I mean, it's expanded to say our species

in the entire world, but we know it really meant like Europeans in the entire rest of the world. So yeah, there's no way to think about any of the species, so Caribbean Monk Seal being extinct, the North Atlantic right whale who, by the way, as we record this, are migrating to give birth not too far off the coast of South Carolina. Their numbers being so low, the Hawaiian monk seal that you mentioned before, the species that are endangered, the marine mammal species that are endangered absolutely have been harmed by some aspect of the colonial project. Whether they were explicitly hunted, whether their habitats were destroyed or whatever reason. The reason that they're endangered is a result of colonialism, if not an intentional part of the project of colonialism which in some cases it was, certainly a byproduct of it. So yeah, they're completely linked and so that…this is of course why we need decolonial ecologies. I don't know if there really is any way to ethically think ecologically without a decolonial ethic and imperative.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 40:01
Yeah. I think that actually, like, you give a hint…now a train is passing. (laughs)

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 40:12
This is the train. The scary thing is it's not a tornado, but the scary thing is they say that if a tornado was close to you, it will sound like a train. But of course there's a train that goes right by here, so…anyways (laughs). But I'm safe and also the winds are clearly active.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 40:33
Yeah. I'm a trained biophysicist so I've been trained for years in university during my PhD to use this pseudo-objective language which is a way to distance ourselves from the project, from the animal, to see the animal as someone who doesn't have feeling or doesn't belong to a family or a kinship or a group. And it took me years to become aware of it and it also took me years to unlearn this language and to learn actually, like, to be much more accountable for my research, to be…yeah, to take the responsibility and the accountability of what I'm writing. And this requires a lot of practice and I love that your book is a guide. It's not only telling us nice stories but it's really, yeah, a survival guide for the present, for the future. I love that you ask so many questions in your writing without always giving us the answer, meaning that our brain is trying to find an answer meaning that while reading your book, my brain was deconstructing and unlearning what it's known. I also love that the last chapters describe activities that can be done alone or in groups. I mean I want to come back to this subject of collectivity and group but, yeah, could you tell us something about this practice of practicing? I'm thinking that heteronormativity, colonialist, capitalist thinking, it's very, very strongly rooted and internalized, meaning that we have to practice every day, not only once. So how did this idea of writing this book as a practicing guide came to you?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 42:59

Yeah, I think that it really is an artifact of my own practice. So that's…I don't know. I mean I guess that idea comes from maybe just the way that I learn. I'm not the type of person that's like, "Alright, I did it, I learned it", like, I have to…I'm iterative, right, I have to repeat. I have to do it, like, every day for a year to even understand what I think about this, you know? And that definitely was the case in terms of, like, why am I so drawn to marine mammals? I don't know. And every day I still didn't know. And it just took all that repetition. And so I…those questions are really my questions. You know, like, it's not a device necessarily but of course inviting everyone into the practice when it is in the form of a book means that we get to wonder, you know? We get to wonder together and this is not the enlightenment project that says everything can be completely known and the goal is to know it and own it and, you know, capitalize on it. That's not my goal in general, right? My reason for studying with marine mammals was not to come to some point where…that I would be a marine mammal expert or I would just know everything that they know or I could actually make them irrelevant by, I don't know, making my own mechanical blowhole or something, who knows. But it really was about, "This is what I want to be present to" and I know that something will happen, but I don't know what will happen and sharing it with other people, I also don't know what will happen, you know, for them. And what if we understood that that is a way to be and that it's a worthwhile way to be. In fact, it really is the way that we must be, I think, in order to get into right relationship with the planet where we live, with each other. And how do I - you know, I'm still unlearning also -, how do I unlearn this internalized capitalist imperative to believe I do have to know everything and I have to be productive and I have to be able to tell someone why it's valuable in advance of what even…not even knowing what I'm really doing, you know, all of those things which is, of course, is also part of the publishing industry, right? And so…so yeah, I never would have written a proposal like, "Hey, publisher, I'm gonna write a book about marine mammals, it's gonna do this, this, this, this, this, this", you know? I would have no idea how to describe any of this except as I practiced it and I want that to continue which is why there's these activities that can be guides, obviously, there's infinite things that people could do and there's so many things people have done with this book that I never would have thought. But just some suggestions, so that you can understand that this isn't something for you to just consume. This is an offering towards your being and you can come back to it whenever you want. And you could just, you know, you can never finish it in your whole life if you want. You could just work with one phrase or you know, like, it's not about that for me and it doesn't have to be about that for the reader. But however, just like all of us, anybody who picks up a book has already been impacted by the momentum and inertia at the same time, of enlightenment, and of this idea, like, well, if I pick this book up, I should finish it, though. Or if I'm reading this book, what are the facts, you know, that I need to then know, so that I can, you know, it's not about that. And there's another way for us to relate to language. It's all of these things at the same time…are a different way of relating to ourselves, to what it means to be alive on this planet, to language, to study, all of those are really the same opportunity for presence. And yeah, to me that's what I'm seeking to learn and I don't know it. So all I can do is practice.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 48:06
Yeah. I mean, like, again, about those activities and practices, I was very impressed that none of them involve to actually, like, go to water, to ocean, to a river or to a marine mammal zoo. It's all…I mean, like, all activities that one can do at home, wherever and whatever home means. Yeah, could you tell us more about this? I'm also thinking that access to nature is a privilege. So yeah, could you tell us more about this accessibility of those practices?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 48:59
You're absolutely right, it's about accessibility. It's true that access to water itself, even drinking water if we're honest, is differential and is also shaped by these systems of oppression. And also, I think that the underlying concept of this whole book is that we are not separate from the ocean. We're not separate from anybody who lives in the ocean, who lives in the river, who lives in the lake and right now, I am connected to all marine mammals, right now, right here, just sitting in here in this room. And how do I practice that? And I think what makes us connected is, you know, here I am, there's saltwater all through my body. Here I am, breathing and needing oxygen and expelling CO2, you know, like…it is the case that my existence is oceanic, whether or not I can see or hear the ocean or any other body of water in this moment or not. The connection is not actually limited to proximity and, you know…I know, I mean, it's a book, you know what I'm saying? So, like, who knows where people will encounter it? And I don't…I don't know if I really thought about it, like, well, this is a privilege thing and I don't want it to be…I think I was just, like, this is a portal to whoever reads this and there's this infinite situations. Now, I know from everybody tagging me on Instagram that a lot of people do take it to the beach and they take the book to the lake and they read it right next to the river. And that's great because parts of it I wrote right next to the ocean and, you know, that's wonderful when that's possible. And I wasn't…I was writing these because of an emotional state that I was experiencing and embodied physiological grief that I was experiencing, that I experienced as oceanic, not because I was near an ocean but just because that was how I experienced it, right? So anybody could be bringing this work to their experience and it should meet them where they are, quite literally. And that's, yeah, that's…that is the only way I can be honest about - you know, in the introduction - who I say it's for, right? I say it's for you, whoever you are. And if it's not really going to be applicable to you unless you, you know, have your scuba certification, then it's not for you. It's only for people who scuba dive and I could write something just for people who scuba dive, like, hooray for that. But that's not what this is, you know?

Aouefa Amoussouvi 52:11
Yeah. Yeah, I'm like, some of those activities are…you can do them alone but you can also do them as a group. I mean, like, it seems that most or many, many marine mammals live in pods, in groups. Sometimes, even for some, maybe for travel they are even staying in interspecies groups. So they're just giving us huge, beautiful lessons about kinship and collectivity and I'm like, to me, your book is an activator of individual and collective transformation. I read from many readers, I mean, like, online, that

many people took this book and started a group initiative and community projects. I would like to know, yeah, which kind of responses and which kind of...yeah, which kind of projects did people do with your book? And are there maybe, like, some surprises? How do you feel about it?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 53:21

Oh, I love it. I love all of it because how can I know, you know? How can I know that it's useful or how it will be useful until people use it for what they want to use it for, right? That's...it's a way that I get to continue to learn even after finishing and sending the book out into the world. I can't now change the book. I mean, I guess I can if I want to put a different edition or whatever but it's still changing me because I'm like, oh, these...you know, a library had a contest and all these different people, they made artwork inspired by what they got from "Undrowned" and I was like, okay, that's what they saw or that they put these things together. And I really feel like it's all a gift to me because it's a way that I get to learn about something that I obviously am very interested in learning about, right, because I've been in daily practice every day around it. So yeah, there's too many examples to name. Every day people are messaging or tagging and I love seeing when people are using it, when young people are using it, that gets me very excited. There's been so many different youth initiatives where they have been using "Undrowned". There was a scuba diving certification class, they used it. That was inspiring. There were people who were doing mutual aid and thinking about their pods that they were creating during the pandemic, they were using it for that. You know, there's a...it's supposed to be useful, you know? It's supposed to be useful, otherwise I could just...I don't have to share it, you know? I could just think about it and have it be for my own process and that's great, and that's enough if that's what I need in my process. But if I'm going to share it with the world, it's really exciting, you know, that people say, "Oh, good", you know, because this is gonna help me with maybe something that they were wanting to do anyway. But this is something that supports that. And so there are these collective projects that have drawn on the work or have done the activities together, you know, different people's classrooms, different trainings or organizations. People...I mean, people have been dressing to match the book, like, somebody sent me a picture. They have their bikini is the same colors as the cover of the book and, like, that's great (laughs). Or people have used it in their, you know, like, bless their babies and to have their commitment ceremonies and to...a lot of parents have told me that they, like, read it every day. They read part of it to their kids as they're falling asleep, you know, all these different uses that I don't think I was imagining them when I kind of correlated it into the book form that it is. But I get it because we're always connected to this reality. So when you're putting your baby to sleep, so when you're getting dressed, so when you're trying to figure out how to make a decision together, when you're sharing resources...this is relevant in all of those moments. And I appreciate that people have a claim on it and they're like, "Yeah, this is for me to use".

Aouefa Amoussouvi 56:56

Yeah. One, I think that in one chapter, but it's also something that come in few of those activities, is action of listening. I think that at least in the Western society, we are trained to talk and the more, the louder,

the more is the best. And I think also our visual, I'm like, what we see is a sense of thing is very, very important. I think that's the reason why we get nowadays so addicted to our phones, or smartphones and the screen of laptop. Yeah, so with the book, I also practiced to listen, so…and to sense without my eyes. I've been listening to a lot of marine mammals sounds while reading your book and preparing also this interview. And I think that the sound, they open a new dimension in space and in time. I think also because they are produced in the water, in this huge space of water. So yeah, this is not a human scale. And so marine mammals, they are, yeah, they are past, present, they are future and with the ongoing climate change, the oceans are rising, so we can think that it might be good for them because they would have more space but the truth is capitalism and also the global warming destroys and affects, I'm like, deeply affects their living environment. And so their lives are threatened. So with the decline of the marine mammals, we're also losing their skills and qualities, for example listening. But what other qualities might be lost if the marine mammals disappear?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 59:13

Yeah, I mean, there's so many layers of this because it's everything. It's everything. So the air itself, right, I mean I write about it in "Undrowned". The impact of the killing of whales and the reduction of the whale numbers through hunting, commercial hunting of whales is impacting the air at the same level as, like, a huge deforestation, right? That is…they are such an important part of the air cycle because they're massive and they're cycling the air through. So that's something that we lose. If we're still breathing which is not, you know, guaranteed, the…I mean, it's interesting because there are skills. I mean just breathing is a skill in water and also on land and even though it's an involuntary biological process, it's still as you know - you have learned and know and also have taught - it's something that we can do intentionally. There's different capacities of breathing that are amazing. It's amazing how, you know, harbor seals can slow down their hearts. It's amazing how, you know, the scale at which a sperm whale breeds, all of these things are amazing. And it's…to me, it's not the skill itself, like, if we lose this being, we lose this skill off of the planet even though that's true. It's the wonder that is the ultimate loss, like, there is an animal that exists right now, another mammal that exists, a harbor seal somewhere is slowing their heart down from a 130 beats per minute to three beats per minute to dive. That's happening in the same planet where I am, that's happening. And that's not necessarily doing something for me except it is with the carbon cycle and you know, how they're interacting with the micro organisms actually is benefiting me. But also conceptually, just knowing that shapes my experience on this planet, right? So that's the level of loss that I…that I'm working with most in this book. But it's not disconnected from…you know, people like my dear friend, the biologist Kriti Sharma, who is studying the micro organisms at the bottom, in the sediment at the bottom of the ocean or underneath a whale fall that are processing carbon and that are part of the huge management that the ocean is doing, of the global warming that industrial pollution is causing. It's…yeah, it's all connected but at the end of the day we lose everything. You know, like, and I think about what I write about the North Atlantic right whale because I'm also of Shinnecock ancestry and Shinnecock has been in sacred relationship with the North Atlantic right whale for many centuries. And the Shinnecock

community could not have existed and created the culture of Shinnecock that…the shoreline living that these ancestors created without this relationship of what happens when a North Atlantic right whale beaches or there's that offering. So there's, like…it's all, like, if you keep going, like, where would you start? The loss is total. So the loss of the Caribbean monk seal is a total loss. It's not replaceable. It's not incidental. It's not separate from the larger unlivability that we're investing in each moment that we comply with capitalism because everything is connected. The loss is total because everything connected is connected. The potential is infinite, like, the possibility is infinite, right? And those are the things that are true at the same time and we have to find ways to be with that.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 1:04:24

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SHOW NOTES – Episode 3.1

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Alexis Pauline Gumbs, "Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals" (2020):

https://www.akpress.org/undrowned.html

Alexis Pauline Gumbs, "Unertrunken: Was ich als Schwarze Feministin von Meeressäugetieren lernte" (2022):

https://akiverlag.com/books/alexis-pauline-gumbs-unertrunken.html

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https://www.akpress.org/featured-products/emergent-strategy-series.html

Diana Ejaita:

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Kriti Sharma:

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North Atlantic Right Whale

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Shinnecock:

https://www.shinnecock-nsn.gov/

EPISODE 3.2 - Pseudo-Objective Scientific Language and Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals with Dr. Alexis Pauline Gumbs

Synopsis

Our second episode with Dr. Alexis Pauline Gumbs takes a closer look at the fascinating and adaptable skills of marine mammals. We also come back to the practice of breathing and how it can help us to slow down in this fast-moving capitalist world. In addition, Alexis reads us a passage from her book "Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals" and we hear about what marine mammals can teach us about breathing mindfully and intentionally. Together, we also reflect on the harmful narratives created by scientific language, colonialist ideas within the scientific world and how capitalism impacts our ways of inhabiting the Earth. Lastly, we talk about the Afrodeutsch or Afro-German movement as well as Alexis' current research and book project on the poet, scholar and activist Audre Lorde.

Speakers

Dr. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Dr. Aouefa Amoussouvi

Aouefa Amoussouvi 00:33

Welcome to the *Decolonial Ecologies* podcast series, a podcast series in which we talk about the history of ecology, how it became a scientific academic field interconnected with systems of power and oppression. Colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, Eurocentrism and heteronormativity have been applied to produce ecological knowledge that claims to be universal and objective. Therefore, museums and universities have contributed to shape and justify an extractive way of inhabiting the earth. In each episode, you will hear a researcher, an activist or an artist who challenges the Western mainstream narrative on ecology with intersectional feminist and queer perspectives, perspectives from Black, Indigenous and People of Color. We will discuss decolonial practices in both the Global South and the Global North to more ethically respond to the current climate and social crises. Besides individual and citizen actions, we will also take a look at the responsibility of museums and universities to deconstruct the colonial heritage of their own structures. For example, we will discuss how restitution of colonial artifacts by museums can be seen as a part of the climate and environmental justice agenda. I'm Aouefa Amoussouvi, I'm your host for this podcast series. In this episode, our guest is Dr. Alexis Pauline Gumbs. Dr. Alexis Pauline Gumbs is an American writer, scholar, activist and educator. She's the author of several books including "Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals". So, Alexis, we are here today for a second discussion together. Again, I'm just very, very glad that you accepted our invitation and I'm very, very just looking forward to our second discussion with you. Welcome!

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 02:52

I'm so happy to be here. You froze for a second. But I'm very excited about our conversation.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 02:58
I wanted to start this episode with the topic of breathing. Yeah, I think that the marine mammals have lungs like us so we are kind of related and it seems as if they have superpower. When I read the book, I had the feeling that "Are they on Earth, really?". Yeah, they can just dive so deep for so long in extreme condition. Many of those marine mammal live in very, very cold, icy environment. I would like you maybe to, maybe to give us a few of those extraordinary skills that they have.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 03:40
Oh, there's so many, like the bowhead whale, for example. Their spines never set so they can literally keep growing forever, and by forever, I mean centuries. So bowhead whales often and especially outside of a violent context of, you know, boats, live for hundreds of years. Like, there could still be a bowhead whale alive right now that is older than colonialism, you know what I'm saying? So that's huge and they can just continue to grow, for example, that's one of the things that I'm like, "What?!". Yeah, I mentioned before the harbor seals and how they can slow down their hearts so much. Often I'm just in awe of how much fat is in the lactation milk of the seals and the seal mothers and, like, how profoundly nutritious that is because you're right, I mean, it seems like very extreme circumstances, like, these baby seals have to be fully ready to live in a freezing cold ocean to swim really far to evade predators, all of which would feel like a baby seal is totally delicious and nutritious for the same reason. And they have that capacity like that, you know? Or the...I mean, there's just, there's just so many things. The way that the seal they call the Weddell seal, but who is Weddell and why does he deserve that? They make these sounds, they really do sound like they're a spaceship landing and yeah, I could go, I mean, I could go on forever but the wonder of marine mammal existence is something that will never get old for me and I appreciate the fact that right now, in my DMs on Instagram, people are sending me articles they find and videos and images that are continuing to just be in wonder and awe of these just adaptively fascinating and inspiring beings that we are related to.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 06:21
Again, about breathing: It's a mandatory and automatic mechanism for us but it's also a process that we can control. However, many of us had forgotten that we have the power of consciously breathing in and out at our chosen rhythm, and breathing consciously, it's magical but also a dangerous power because we can stop and elongate the time in a way. And when we breathe fully, we are also more aware of our emotions. You also say at the beginning that for you, the beginning of this book was also related with grieving, a process of grief that you had. I'm thinking in...I mean, like, it's also my personal experience that the capitalist drive make us go every day without being very fully aware of how we feel and I think, for me, your book was also an invitation of practicing to slow down the time to be aware of how I feel. And I was wondering which kind of society, which kind of, maybe new humanity we would become if we would practice fully to breathe every day as a society?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 07:59

I really wonder, I really wonder what we would become. I mean, I think that...we just breathe right now, I think that would be great because I think there are so many...often...so capitalism can only function if we act against the impulse of our breathing in many, many ways, all day long, right? If my impulse is tuned in to not like what will support my breathing which is a form of knowing and experiencing feeling, you know, that you're just describing, but, like, what will pay my rent, right? That's kind of the short circuit that's happening all day long and so I think that if we were to fully, fully breathe and support each other in that and prioritize that over everything, you know, like, we wouldn't even want to have a condition of stress where anybody would be unable to fully access their breath in that way, like, we would do anything to avoid that, right? If we set up life that way, it will be completely different because, obviously, so many of the things that we have in our society are stressful. They are not taking into account the fact that we're actually living beings. They are really wishing that we were all machines and that's counter to what we know when we fully agree. So it would be unrecognizable, the society that we would have that was informed by that, but it's that's the society that I want, that there's a short story I wrote called "Evidence" that imagines somebody from five generations in the future who's writing back and that's one of the things they talk about, they talk about that, you know, nobody would want to interrupt someone else's growing, nobody would want to disturb someone else's breathing and in that context, I'm thinking about a world shaped by capitalism. And again, there's no separation. So it's also a world shaped by normalized sexual violence. It's an attack on growth, it's an attack on breathing. It is quite literally trauma that often stops us from being able to breathe fully and it is breathing fully that can eventually give us the lessons and healing and possibility of growing into other ways of being beyond our trauma responses. Maybe capitalism is a very long trauma response. That's one way of understanding it to me. So yeah, I think that that's the...I think that that's the form of being that we all know in our breathing that we deserve and that we want for each other, and it's interrupted in a thousand ways.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 11:26

Hmm, yeah. Yeah, could you maybe give us one practice to be more like marine mammals and to, yeah, to consciously train to breath fully?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 11:45

Oh, yeah, there's so many practices. One that I do....so we think about the harbor seal that we were talking about earlier and I don't know how....I don't know what marine mammals are like at the end of the day, right? I know my observation. I don't know if the harbor seal studies her heart or if that's just what she does, she knows and that's just what it is. But I think that we could study our hearts and we could just, like, monitor our pulse, you know, like put our hand to...I'm putting my hand to my throat, you could put your hand to wrists, you could put your hand over your heart and just notice what it does. What are the situations in which it is slower or faster and what do you notice about that, what does that mean? Are there times where your heart is beating faster and you're having shallower breaths and it's because you

actually are feeling this is an unsafe space or situation that you're in? Are there times that your heart is accelerating and this is because you're so excited about something? You know, it's one of the practices that I've been in is: What is my heartbeat telling me and then, what would it mean to act accordingly, you know? It seems very basic, like, we're living beings, we need a heartbeat, we need the blood to flow. But I don't think we often think about putting ourselves in situations or collectively creating conditions that support our heartbeat.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 13:44
Yeah, I would love you to maybe read a short part of your book about this topic of breathing.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 14:01
Breath is a practice of presence. One of the physical characteristics that unites us with marine mammals is that they process air in a way similar to us. Though they spend most or all of their time in water, they do not have gills. We, too, on land are often navigating contexts that seem impossible for us to breathe in, and yet we must. The adaptations that marine mammals have made in relationship to breathing are some of the most relevant for us to observe, not only in relationship to our survival in an atmosphere we have polluted on a planet where we are causing the ocean to rise, but also in relationship to our intentional living, our mindful relation to each other. With meditations on the different ways that narwhal, beluga, and bowhead whales breathe in the Arctic, the ways baby seals learn to redefine breath in infancy, the relationship between the endangered North Atlantic right whale and my Shinnecock and enslaved ancestors, and even a surprise visit by a Blacktip reef shark, this section offers us opportunities to look at what blocks our breathing, and the stakes of a society that puts profit over breath. May our breathing open up to the possibility of peace.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 15:36
Thank you!

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 15:38
You're welcome.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 15:55
In the first episode, we already talked a bit about the violence of the language, of the scientific language. And this language is basically one tool of a system of oppression, colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, Eurocentrism, heteronormativites, power systems that have been applied in narrative of science and also applied to the construction of ecology as an academic discipline. This Western ecology usually denied Indigenous system of knowledge. This also means that most of the time, the, I'm like, these Indigenous cultures that have been living in relationship and in contact with some of the marine mammals are being sometimes denied access to those locations. And also, the naming of these animals in a Western scientific

way also gives justification to separate the Indigenous people and the interest culture from these animals. It's also a way to justify maybe capture and the retaining of those animals in captivity. I know that there is one or two marine mammals that managed to survive without being named by the Western scientific community. Could you tell us maybe a little bit about one or two of those animals?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 17:47
Well, I mean, there's a couple of things. I think that there's really...when I was writing this I was trying to find, yeah, I was trying to find names, right? I was trying to find alternative names. Sometimes I was making up names because I was like, well, it looks like this, whatever. And sometimes there were names of Indigenous groups who have been in relationship with these particular marine mammals that I could find. But the one that's actually in the guidebook was...the Indigenous name was Tuxuci which is a river dolphin in the Amazon. And, you know, it's interesting to me, you know, that this one dolphin is, even in the Smithsonian guidebook, referred to by this name. And I'm happy about that because I'm like, it shows the possibility, right? It shows that if, as someone, scientist or otherwise, who really is interested in understanding this particular being, you would want to understand their context, right? And that includes the people that have been part of their ecosystem with them over generations and that naming has so much to teach us. So yeah, that and there's something about that that, of course, is related to all of our naming and a nameability and resistance of being understood and resisting what you describe so well, that colonial impulse to disempower and control through imposing a name as a claim on land, on beings, on whole groups of people and certainly on marine mammals and all kinds of species of life.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 19:51
Yeah. Yeah, we had a guest in one of the previous episodes of the podcast series, Dr. Mordecai Ogada, who says that conservation is a new colonialism. He's based in Kenya so he is, was saying that in Kenya, in Africa, a huge piece of land gets fenced and access to the Indigenous population is being denied. But he was also saying about capitalization of the resources in those lands and also the capitalization of the animals present on those lands. And I would like to talk with you about the link hat you may see about capitalism and marine mammals. There is an entire chapter in the book that urges us to end capitalism. To me, capitalism has totally or sometimes partially destroyed some populations, species of animals but also some parts of the environment and it seems nowadays that capitalism is sold as the solution to fix this. Could you say maybe something? What do you think about this?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 21:26
Well, I could say very, very succinctly: Capitalism is not the solution. And I very much agree with this idea that the way that conservation is being practiced and it's being practiced through capitalism, capitalist forms, and it's, you know, so you can have, you can take a safari and you can, you know, be on this preserve that supposedly is "saving" the environment through this other form of claiming of it and absolutely through complete lack of accountability to Indigenous populations, as usual. This is what capitalism is,

right? So if the relation is built on this extractive form, that's the relation it will reproduce. And that is, as simple as you can say it, you know, it's the source of the problem. It's not the solution to the problem. Now, the thing is that we are generations and generations of people who only know how to collaborate through capitalism, right? I mean, the interface we're using to do this podcast, you know, the institutions that we gather in and, you know, the publishers of the guide books that I read, all of those things are also produced within systems of capitalism. It's all capitalized, right? So what's true is that shifting on a species level, our relationship to life does have to be collaborative, it does require us to connect across many acrosses. The only way that seems available to collaborate on that scale is through capitalism, right? And that's not actually the only way to collaborate, but that's the...that's the justification that would lead folks to say, "Well, this is how we're going to address this, we're going to address it in a capitalist form" because then the only thing that we have built that functions at a species scale is capitalism. That's the only thing that we in our species have built that functions at a species scale so far. And...or, at least, I don't, I mean, I don't know even if as I'm saying that that is true, or that's reifying this possibility but there are other forms of connection, you know, there are forms of connection that we don't even understand that are happening, and there are forms of relation that are as large as our species and larger, that are interspecies, that in fact have been practiced for so long. And this is exactly what it means to turn away from Indigenous leadership into this kind of multinational capitalist "conservation" is that it denies that there actually are older systems of relation that are capable of producing a sustainable, ethical future relation where capitalism is not and will not, and has not, and does not.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 25:35
You were also saying that capitalism also chooses which animal is supposed to be protected or saved over other. Yeah, maybe you can, maybe, like, say something about this. Which animal is trendy to save? Which...I think that Dr. Mordecai Ogada in Kenya said that when the Lion King was released, all the money was put on lions and hyenas were not getting funding anymore. And yeah, could you say something about the funding and trendiness of marine mammals?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 26:23
It's all narrative, you know, it's all narrative and it's all a story. And we've seen, for example, with the Orca, the incredible public relations that say like, okay, if they're captive at SeaWorld and they can be entertainment, you have Shamu on the posters and it's a whole trend and that actually doesn't necessarily support the lives of orcas. But it supports the captivity and separation from their actual most relevant context of orcas, right? And, you know, the songs of the humpback whale, that that has been something that's really been put forward. And probably the most iconic images of whales that you can see, that you can find a photo of on the internet or that you can see everything, a pillow, a postcard, or whatever made out of, it's often humpback whales because of that, right? And so there is...it's always going to be a story, you know? I don't think that especially what we do in our species, we don't get outside of story ever. There's some kind of poetics or some kind of context that we're creating, we're creating meaning and you

know, this is how Sylvia Winter talks about it. But what is that story doing? What is it for? And who is it for and what...yeah, what are our intentions with telling these particular stories? And as you say, you know, in my work, it's like, I want there to be a lot of holes in the story. I want there to be a lot of spaces to breathe. I want there to be a lot of questions because the story is not over. And I think there is actually - coming back to violence - there's a violent saying that, well, this is what an Orca is, a captive entertainer. That's what an Orca is. That is a very limited story about a being that has such an ecological impact, that has cultures and has communication and has so much relevance to its environment that could never be told if we just sat here and tried to tell all of it for the rest of our lives, you know? It's that expansive. And so yeah, similarly, stories of what hyenas are from, you know, these characters that are also racialized, by the way, in The Lion King. That is, like, a very... it's such a small and scarce and limited story that it is a stereotype, right? So, like, you get to story in that way that's so narrow and limiting. What I want - and this is what I feel is part of my responsibility as somebody who works in story because I'm a writer - is how can it be the most expansive story? How can it be the most inclusive? How can it be a story that doesn't pretend that it knows itself to be complete, but it just can continue to grow and change and invite us into presence? But yeah, so those trends are dangerous and they're dangerous to the animals themselves.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 29:59
Yeah. Yeah, my next question is about, I'm like, deconstruction of those narrative. I'm thinking about all the scientists that are now being trained in universities. Universities are places of knowledge production, knowledge transmission. I was curious to know if you have been, maybe, working, have you maybe given writing workshop with scientists? Have you been in contact with scientists and what have been the responses of the scientific community to this book?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 30:41
Yeah, it's been really good. It's been really good. I think I write about it in the introduction, that one of the last writing workshops I did before quarantine in 2020 was with scientists at Caltech in collaboration with Kriti Sharma who I mentioned, the biologist I mentioned before, and it was so fun. It was based on this idea that whatever it is that they study, there's reasons for it, right? There's like emotional, spiritual, deep, deep reasons that only they know, you know, that are there and to write about that, and to share about that. And I actually think they created a writing group that continued on after that, which I think is really cool. One of the great honors of my journey with this book is that the organization "Black in Marine Science" has taken on this book, they took on this book as, like, their book to read for the year. And that's so great to me, you know, that they find it supportive and it resonates with why they're doing the work that they're doing in the way that they're doing it and that part of being a Black marine scientist, is...yeah, you have your relationship with the marine world that you're obviously very interested and fascinated with. But you're also bumping up against these ideas that are colonialist, even in the department meetings, even in the, you know, publication process, all of those things. And so it means a lot to me to be able to be

supportive to that community in particular who are people who I feel like are reclaiming a relationship with the ocean that can be really, really powerful. Yeah, so those are a couple of things. There have been some other big conferences of scientists where they've been, like, buying this book and giving it to everyone. And so I appreciate that. I wouldn't say that that's dominant, you know? But I think that the scientists who are reading it are like, "Okay, this is something that I've been looking for", that is, you know, it's rooted in the specificity of what I learned about marine mammals that is often based in the research of the same scientists. But it is also giving them space to be in relation with their purpose in a way that's more expansive than sometimes the constrictions of their disciplines in their fields and even the university itself as, as you say, a site of colonial knowledge production.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 33:09
Yeah, I'm like, staying in this subject of institutions, I'm like, I'm based in Berlin. The podcast series is hosted and funded by the Humboldt Forum which is one ethnographic museum. There are a lot of critics and debates concerning the topic of restitution of artworks and objects that have been stolen or acquired under sometimes very unclear condition during the colonial time. And those objects and artwork are now stored in this ethnographic museum and worldwide in different ethnographic museum and museum of natural histories. While reading your book I had to think about the similarities of marine mammals and those objects. Both are seen by the Western and capitalist eyes as objects to be owned, stored, kept in captivity and also to be experimented with. Yeah, both in their places of origin, so marine mammals and those objects. In the local Indigenous culture where they are from are often seen as entities, as living entities with personalities, own names, are talked to, are fed, are loved or feared. They might be part of a family, they are seen as family members, as gods, as ancestors. Could you maybe comment on this thought of these objects alone in those museums?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 35:07
Yeah, I mean, it's what we've been talking about the whole time, right? It's this idea of coloniality as a form of profound disconnection, right? So it's to contain the skeletons of many, many marine mammals, to actually contain living marine mammals, you know, in these different entertainment theme parks, to even before we talk about the many human remains that are also in the unjust custody of so many institutions, academic institutions, museums right now. It's almost like the perfect example, like, if you were gonna write a poem, right, like the museum is, like, this is the form of separation that we're talking about literally is separate from every context. What it's united in is, it's united in its claim, right? It's united in the fact that it's owned and, you know, I understand that the work of libraries, the work in museums is cross referencing and you know, this is why they accumulate so that they can compare this and that and the other, right, with this idea that at some point they'll know everything, right? And that that's a form of control which might feel necessary inside of a trauma response where you really feel like you need that control. That is not what life is, though. Life isn't separate, life cannot be contained and as you say, these pre-existing relationships, and I obviously am understanding myself in kinship with marine

mammals and drawing on forms of kinship that have existed with my ancestors and marine mammals that this is what it takes for us to honor life, what life actually is, what life depends on, what it takes to create a livable circumstance or even just allow a livable circumstance. There's a Shinnecock legal scholar, Dr. Kelsey Leonard, who has done amazing work around legal personhood of water and I'm with her 100%, you know? I fully agree that yes, the water, everyone who lives in the water, all the marine mammals, you know, all of it. This is...what she's saying in a legal context is that there's this possibility of moving in that direction that honors these entities as what they are which is life itself, as opposed to what we actually have which is that corporations have personhood. And the harm that corporations do can be considered their free speech, as they destroy the water for example and the air and you know, and everything, and our relationships and our time. All the things. Yeah, and so I think that's one step. And there's so much repatriation that is necessary and so much reparation that is necessary and it's...I'm in full solidarity, you know, with each Indigenous group that's arguing for repatriation of their relatives that are captive in aquariums right now. And absolutely, with the artifacts, with the sacred items, with the human remains, with all of the "loot" that has been stolen as part of the colonial project in this attempt to create separation and dominance, that repatriation and reparation is what is necessary to move towards this context of collaboration and coexistence and freedom.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 39:44
Yeah, my dad would say "Amen, hallelujah". (laughs)

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 39:53
(laughs) Yeah, that's right, that's right! Can I get a witness? Yes! (laughs)

Aouefa Amoussouvi 39:59
If he would be with us, but I guess he will listen to the podcast and he will probably, like, put "Hallelujah".

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 40:06
Yeah, shoutout, shoutout to your dad, that's wonderful! (laughs)

Aouefa Amoussouvi 40:27
Yeah, I would like to go on with the topic of remember, rememberness. And I know that you are working on the biography of Audre Lorde. Audre Lorde has a special place in the heart of Berlin because she traveled to Berlin, has lived in Berlin for some times between '84 and '92. She was teaching at the Freie University as a guest professor and she empowered Afro-German women to connect with each other and to write their stories and their life. Yeah, stories and people who have been invisibilized and yeah, she activated and catalyzed a movement of Afro-German, so "Afrodeutsch" art and literature. There are already some biographic film and texts on Audre Lorde, but I know that you are writing right now a

biography of her. And so I would like to know, yeah, which approach do you have? What's maybe like your angle of view? What's your methodology? Tell us more, please.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 41:50

Yeah, I'm very excited about it and it really...it connects, I think actually writing "Undrowned" helped prepare me to write this biography I call "The Eternal Life of Audre Lorde" in the way that I'm writing it because Audre Lord was really interested in Earth, life on Earth, animals, water, stones, like, she was...stars, space, like, from a young age and throughout her life, this is something that was really important. And you can see some of the imagery in her poetry speaks to that deep research that she did. But I don't think people really understand how deep it was, you know, like, she was, like, collecting stones and polishing them and examining them and really studying geology and astronomy and all of these things. And so I take that approach, I take that approach in this biography, I think about Audre Lorde as the force of nature and I also think about her in relationship with nature. And as one of the key people that we really need to look at for what can life mean cosmically for us, at this time, on this planet. And Berlin, so when Audre Lorde came to Berlin and you know, she has this amazing poem "Berlin is hard on Colored girls", right, that she wrote during her first visit to Berlin which as you say, she returned to basically every year after that first visit. And it was a very important part of her life and it was also very important because her medical care providers were providing cancer treatment that was not available in the United States that was in alignment with her approach to living and her quality of life. So in “Berlin is hard on Colored girls”, she's talking about, you know, listening which we talked about, right, this idea of listening. And she's listening to this woman speaking and the way she describes it is the rhythm of gray whales’ prey, right? And that's such for me a grounding image for how Audre Lorde thought about Berlin, related to Afrodeutsch feminist, she won. So the gray whale as I wrote in "Undrowned" "disappeared" from the Atlantic after the slave trade and I speculate about why but also understanding that during the entire slave trade because gray whales are the filter feeders who actually filter down at the bottom of the ocean, the sediment, they were the ones filtering actually the remains and the physical forms of the enslaved people who drowned. And so there's that, there's also the fierceness, like the gray whale mothers were so fierce in terms of protecting their children and, you know, Audre Lorde had this mothering relation that she took on with the younger Afrodeutsch feminists that was important for her, it was important for them. And you know, there was a lot of mentorship and there was a lot of inspiration. She encouraged so many people to write their books, you know, Ika, May Ayim, you know, all of these folks who we learn about what Afrodeutsch experience is because they wrote their stories and they felt authorized to write their stories because Audre was saying over and over again, "Write your stories", you know, and wanted to support them in every way to do that. But for her there was this life giving inspiration that she felt from understanding that she could be part of a planetary community of Black feminists and that there were so many different ways to be a Black feminist, and that there's this way that even her practice and idea of what Black feminism was expanded through her relationships with Afrodeutsch feminists with, you know, feminists, Black feminists in the Netherlands and everywhere, in South Africa,

in Australia, in England. And that's something that…so yeah, the gray whale is kind of, like, the grounding metaphor of the section of the biography, right, where I write about Berlin because there's something also about gray, you know? Like we were talking yesterday when you were speaking to how it feels different to be a Black person in Berlin than to be a Black person in France, for example, or in the United States because there is this in-betweenness. There's this real insistence that German profoundly excludes blackness that, you know, there's all of this and then there's, like, small numbers, but of course they have grown and forms of isolation and you know all of these different things. So there's the gray whale but then you get to the, you get to May Ayim publishing her poems because Audre Lorde also insisted that she published her poetry, the "Blues in Black and White", right? And she's talking about race in Germany in this blues form that is related to this sound of the gray whales and the black and white of gray. Anyway, so obviously you see I'm having a good time and I really enjoy thinking about Audre Lorde and her impact and her communities that helped shape her. But yeah, the importance of Berlin and even the German context, and her understanding that Germany as a place so symbolically connected to modern genocidal fascism was exactly what she felt like a transnational, Black feminist connection was meant to answer and stop and exemplify another way of being and there was a way that you can see her in her journals that she wrote every time that she was in Berlin, and when she was in communication with Afrodeutsch feminists especially, and also white German feminists, but she was really trying to get at this idea that what it means to make this place unlivable on a grand scale is something that she really theorized in relationship with the German feminist movement. So yeah, I could, we really could have a whole episode just about Audre Lorde, just about Audre Lorde and her time in Germany, but that is to say, so that's one example. But each of the way that I…the scale of Audre Lorde's life, for me, is a planetary and cosmic scale. And… so my methodology in this biography is to honor that. So, like, I had to learn so much. I mean, obviously, I've been learning about marine mammals, but I had to learn about volcanoes and earthquakes and hurricanes and tornadoes, all of the elements of life and how Earth lives as a body that she was fascinated in. And that also shaped how she thought about her own life and therefore the decision she made about how she moved energy during her life. And it's…there's like nothing else I'd rather do. It's really my dream. It's such a joy. It's like a gift to get to just think pretty much all day about Audre Lorde, about how she connects to every aspect of life. So I'm really excited about what it will mean to share that work so that, you know, we can all be in this conversation about Audre on that scale.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 50:30

Yeah, we are approaching the end of this episode and those two episodes that I had a great chance to do with you. I have five questions that I ask all the guests of the podcast series. So the next question is about knowledge production. The Western knowledge production narrative creates isolated genius characters who seem to come up alone with great ideas. To highlight the continuity and collectivity of knowledge production, yeah, I would like to ask you to give me the name or two names of people who have influenced and inspired your work?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 51:24
Right, there's so many. Obviously Audre Lorde, obviously. But I really want to name M. Jaqui Alexander as somebody who has had such a profound impact on me and especially on the way that I think about the ocean, the way that I think about marine mammal kinship and relationship to transatlantic slave trade. She is my teacher, she is my inspiration. She is someone who has had such a profound influence on me that I don't know, like, what would be left, you know, if we would just take out all of the things that...all the ways that she has touched and transformed and inspired me to be in the way that I am, work in the way that I work, think, feel, in the way that I...in the way that I can. And yeah, I mean, I'm, of course, I'm very explicit about that, my book "M Archive", every single passage of that book cites specifically one of Jackie's phrases or questions. And I agree with you. It's never, ever, ever, ever an individual thing, that's not the scale of life. That's not the scale of thought. It's definitely not the scale of knowledge. And if it's even knowledge we want and it we know, it's not the scale of wisdom. So yeah, so I can name a lot of people because I feel very blessed to be, to live in a time where Black feminism practice exists and always has in my lifetime. But I'll give a special shoutout to Jackie and recommend, I really recommend everybody read and access her book "Pedagogies of Crossing" because it is everything. And I keep reading it over and over again. I've been reading it for almost ten years at this point. So yeah.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 53:22
Could you please recommend one concrete action that people could do today to enact decolonial ecology?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 53:34
Well, you could take a breath as you mentioned before, that would be concrete. Yeah, a lot of it is, like, you could take a breath, you could pay attention to your heart, you could think about what you eat, you know, and the systems that it's connected to. And I don't know what decision that you would necessarily make, listener, based on thinking about, "Okay, this is how, this is how I have access to this". But it's very concrete, right? And we actually are constituted from whatever is available for us to eat and thinking about it, knowing that we are not individually creating these food systems but that we are parts of the food system, that we could, yeah, maybe make a decision. I have made a decision, I don't eat anything that is part of the fishing industry, any seafood whatsoever and I wrote about that in "Undrowned". I'm not saying everyone needs to do that but I know that the excuse for the continued sacrifice of the North Atlantic right whale is tied to the fishing industry. And I'm divesting from it individually, but I'm also thinking about that system and our wider relationship to the ocean, how it directly is shaped by capitalism. So I'm not saying that'll be the conclusion you come to from paying attention to what you eat and whatever that is but maybe just make a decision that you can actually make in the context of the food systems that impact you.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 55:20
What are you working on at this moment?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 55:29
Well, of course this biography of Audre Lorde is what I'm working on. I'm revising it. I love it. So it's like, you know, I kind of, like, never want it to be over. But then the fun part will be when it is over. And then you can read it and we can talk about it, you know, that would be great. And I'm also writing about constellations. Arawak but really the stories, the stories related to the Arawak and Carib astronomers. Yeah, I'm writing poetry around that. I'm looking at the sky a lot, I'm working on a sky study collaboration with my sister friend Yashna Maya Padamsee. And yeah, so many things. I'm writing...I made a daily process with the paintings of Alma Thomas. So I don't know what that's going to be but I love writing about her images. So I've been doing it for more than a hundred days. Yeah, I'm working on being a loving partner, sister, daughter, friend, community member.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 56:51
Do you have anything to add to our today's conversation?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 56:57
Oh no, we got it. (laughs) I love this conversation. I really appreciate the thoughtfulness of your questions.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 57:05
Thank you. Yeah. Where can our listener follow you and find more information about your projects?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 57:15
Yeah. Alexispauline.com. Also, AlexisPauline on Instagram, also Alexis Pauline on Twitter. That's probably the easiest way. The website is a good place. And then, of course, social media is kind of a little bit more, like, real time. But um, yeah, I'm happy for...to be in conversation and I would love to hear thoughts that folks are having or, you know, things that you want to add. So it's easy to remember, AlexisPauline.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 57:50
Yeah. Despite the storms, internet breaking, some natural forces...

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 58:01
And the breakdown of the capitalist interface. (laughs)

Aouefa Amoussouvi 58:05
...yeah, we made it, and we put all the links and the references that we had during this conversation on the website when we release the podcast. Yeah, thank you again. I wish you a beautiful rest of the day!

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 58:21
Thank you. I wish you a beautiful evening.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 58:25
Bye!

Alexis Pauline Gumbs 58:26
Bye! Take good care.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 58:29
Concept, research and moderation are made by me, Aouefa Amoussouvi. Sound production: Annelien Van Heymbeeck. Thank you to Sias Wöbling and Lucile Bouvard for ideas and exchanges. Thank you to Julia Richard and Alondra Meier for the assistance and Michael Dieminger for the invitation. This podcast series is commissioned by 99 Questions at the Humboldt Forum.

SHOW NOTES – Episode 3.2

Alexis Pauline Gumbs:

https://www.alexispauline.com/

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https://twitter.com/alexispauline?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor

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Dr. Kelsey Leonard:

https://www.kelseyleonard.com/

May Ayim:

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EPISODE 4 - Selk'nam and Uru-Chipaya Cosmologies and Singing to the Patagonian Peatlands with Ariel Bustamante

Synopsis

In this episode our guest is Ariel Bustamante, self-taught sound artist from Chile. We talk about his collaborations with the Selk'nam people in the Andes and the Uru-Chipaya nation in Bolivia. We hear about the cosmologies and practices of these people, especially the practice of singing to peatlands. This relationship of mutual care between the Selk'nam people and the peatlands was presented in the trans-disciplinary project "Turba Tol Hol-Hol Tol" at the Venice Biennale in the Chilean Pavilion in 2022 by Ariel and his collaborators. Ariel also shares with us his experience of living alone in the Atacama desert, walking with "wind-persons" and what the spiritual powers of nature can teach us humans. Finally, we discuss the danger of generalizing Indigenous nations and knowledge systems as well as the relevance and the colonial history of anthropology and ethnography.

Speakers

Ariel Bustamante, Dr. Aouefa Amoussouvi

Aouefa Amoussouvi 00:33

Welcome to the *Decolonial Ecologies* podcast series, a podcast series in which we talk about the history of ecology, how it became a scientific academic field interconnected with systems of power and oppression. Colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, Eurocentrism and heteronormativity have been applied to produce ecological knowledge that claims to be universal and objective. Therefore, museums and universities have contributed to shape and justify an extractive way of inhabiting the earth. In each episode, you will hear a researcher, an activist or an artist who challenges the Western mainstream narrative on ecology with intersectional feminist and queer perspectives, perspectives from Black, Indigenous and People of Color. We will discuss decolonial practices in both the Global South and the Global North to more ethically respond to the current climate and social crises. Besides individual and citizen actions, we will also take a look at the responsibility of museums and universities to deconstruct the colonial heritage of their own structures. For example, we will discuss how restitution of colonial artifacts by museums can be seen as a part of the climate and environmental justice agenda. I'm Aouefa Amoussouvi, I'm your host for this podcast series. In today's episode, our guest is Ariel Bustamante. Ariel Bustamante is a Chilean multidisciplinary self-taught artist based in Bolivia. His practice focuses on sound and the physical, cognitive and social aspects of listening. He is currently working on the ecology within the Andes and the Patagonian wetlands. Hello, Ariel! Today it's my pleasure to have you as a guest of the *Decolonial Ecologies* podcast.

Ariel Bustamante 02:50

Thank you for having me.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 02:51
Yeah, as I say, today we are having Ariel Bustamante as a guest. Ariel Bustamante is a self-taught interdisciplinary artist from Chile and currently based in Bolivia. He's mostly working with sound and listening and breath as artistic practices and he has been working on the ecologies of the Andes for the last five years, I think. I would like to start our discussion with the project you were part of, presented for the first time at the last Venice Biennale. The project was called “Hol-Hol Tol”. I hope I pronounced it correctly nd yeah, I would like you to maybe explain us what was this project and how it started, and…yeah.

Ariel Bustamante 03:50
This is a complicated project to explain because it's so big, so long, it's going to keep going probably even without me. It has so many stages and initiatives. The story of the project began with ensayos which is a research practice of a lot of people, a very…of a very unlike group of people, including scientists, artists and more importantly, the Selk'nam nation which are the custodians of this land that is located at the very bottom of South America in Patagonia. And I've been working with them for a couple of years but doing different things. But this project in particular aims to protect the peatlands of Karukinka. Do you know what peatlands are?

Aouefa Amoussouvi 04:56
I understood that it's like wetland?

Ariel Bustamante 05:00
Wetland, yeah, that's one way of describing it.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 05:03
I know that in German it’s “Moor”.

Ariel Bustamante 05:05
Yeah, and I'm asking because many people don't know what they are. I didn't know very well what they were. Peatlands are very old ecosystems that you can find in different parts of the world. However, they have been greatly extracted, usually for unsustainable forms of agriculture, but the ones that are the most preserved in the world are found in Karukinka. And that's why the project helps to protect them. The peatlands, just like any other plant, they absorb CO_2 from the atmosphere and then release oxygen, right? However, because peatlands are so old and so big, if you see them they look like grass, like moss in the ground, its structure grows downwards, right? So from the surface you just see moss in the floor, but they take thousands of years to grow. And they have…today they are one of the greatest reserves of CO_2 because they have captured so much and if they get degraded and if people keep extracting them, they die and release this CO_2 back to the atmosphere. And if that happens, we are definitely screwed. So the

project wants to protect them not only because it's an important biological ecosystem but also because peatlands are the ancestors, the living ancestors of the Selk'nam people. Also, the “Turba Tol Hol-Hol Tol”, which means "heart of peatland" in the Selk'nam language, wants to expose the current struggle the Selk'nam people are having to be recognized as a living nation. This is important to mention because they had been declared dead together with their language, they would declare there is no more Selk'nam people, there is no more Selk'nam language, even though their descendants are claiming to be seen, saying, "We're still here. We're still here". So we're using this platform to visibilize, to show this fight. I think that I should focus into my participation and my role that has to do with...I think it has to do with how to circulate the language, the sounds of Karukinka and also the songs of the Selk'nam people from this area to the Venice Biennale and back to Karukinka in a safe, ethical way. And that, for me, implied to understand how singing worked. What does it mean to sing to peatlands? What was the cosmological order of singing in this place? For example, when the Selk'nam people sing to their peatlands, they're also singing to their ancestors, as I said before, right? So ancestors and peatlands are the same. So when you sing to them, to the peatlands, you're also recognizing and remembering your elders, your dead. So there is a very intricate, indivisible connection between song and land. And when you sing to the land, the land grows well and that obviously allows the living beings that occupied that land to grow well, right? So there is a beautiful and very complex circular relationship between singing and land that was very important to coming to terms with. And in the Chilean pavilion in Italy, we created a small peatland that we gather the moss, this peatland, it’s composed mainly by this moss that's...the scientific name of this moss is sphagnum and we gathered this sphagnum not from Karukinka, obviously, we don't want to harvest that, but we borrow it from one of the few, more sustainable researchers that are happening in the world but more specifically in Germany. The Greifswald Institution, they are producing more sustainable ways of collaborating and producing peat. So we gathered some of it, we put it in our pavilion and we made it grow. We made it grow with...not only with water and light but also with songs because land and songs are indivisible, right, and for that, we also had people that...not only to care of the biological needs of this peat but also that accompany, accompany this being. We call them guardas or which I think can be translated to park rangers or peat keepers, you know. We have five amazing people that work with...that accompany this peatland, this small peatland for eight months. For the whole exhibition, they were there. And one of the guardas, one of the peat keepers, it's the daughter of Hema’ny Molina. Her name is Fernanda Olivares, and these two women were my main collaborators. Hema’ny Molina and Fernanda Olivares have founded the “Hash Saye” which is a cultural institution that wants to celebrate the Selk’nam ways but more specifically, to rebuild or revitalize, to animate this language that has suffered so much. And they're...right now, they are defining their own terms in which this language is shared, it's pronounced, it's created, it's renewed because the Selk'nam language has been greatly scrutinized, studied, written mostly by Western scholars and they were very sensitive about this. So we worked together in defining the protocols in which the language and the songs will travel but also will be heard. The question that we had was: How is it that these songs will be heard? Could the public just come in, record the song for a couple of seconds, then leave? Things like that. So the guards, I think, were one of

the most important aspects of this project because they prepared the listening experience and also in different ways. In the inside of the pavilion we played Selk'nam songs that were made by this family of...composed by Hema'ny and Fernanda because...and that is because the Selk'nam songs are normally shared between families, created between, within a family, within a particular family. We play the songs that were accompanied by the voices of the whole "Turba Tol" team, including myself, including all women, all men, children. You could also hear the sounds of trees moving with the wind, with different winds. You could hear different animals and so on. All of this was recorded in Karukinka and we were following the words of Hema'ny, Hema'ny was guiding ceremonies and she was voicing words that I...that referred to what we could call family. And what we did is that we ask the guardas, the peat keepers to - instead of using text or translating these words into ideas or symbols that were comfortable for us or for the Western world, or that will create analogies, you know, to worlds that are completely different and that shouldn't be compared equally - , so we ask the guards to, instead of translating, to reflect these words by the way they act with the audience, by the way they receive the audience and produce hospitality. And they did that in different ways.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 15:02
Can you describe a bit more?

Ariel Bustamante 15:04
Yeah. They, for example, will talk to the audience before they enter, before they enter. They will tell them stories about the Selk'nam people, they will tell them the importance of peatlands in Karukinka, the importance of peatlands in the world. So there was a transit before entering the pavilion, there were things happening before you enter a listen, right? They will produce an intimate space. They will share smells, for example, we have essence and essence orders that this was a gift from the people that live with the peatlands in the North. Each one of them will have their own ways of making, of helping the artists to get close to us, but I think the most important thing they did was to make them wait, make them wait before entering because as you may know, that is...it's a very hectic place, right? It has a very touristic vibe so people tend to rush, to run through pavilions with their cameras, take a picture, then leave and we didn't want that. So we created a program, it was like a 20 minutes or half an hour program and people have to wait before going through those 20 minutes, 30 minutes. And this is where the guards will translate the spirit of the songs, of these sounds and I think that's one of the most important aspects of this work. And to what I understand, listening really means - which is to me - to have patience, to be patient, you know? I think in that process, you...patience opened an opportunity for you to be taught to learn, you know, to receive. Yeah, so this is more or less what I can tell you about "Turba Tol Hol-Hol Tol".

Aouefa Amoussouvi 17:32
I heard that you talk about the Selk'nam nation using the term "nation". I also know that you have been working in your different projects with different Indigenous people or groups. Maybe you can also

comment about this term “indigenous” and I would like you maybe to situate yourself in regard to those people and to this culture and maybe, like, also explain how - you already started in your last answer - but how do you position yourself with your collaborations?

Ariel Bustamante 18:18

Yeah. It's a great, very complicated question. I try not to generalize Indigenous, indigeneity, you know, or Indigenous groups or Indigenous nations, Indigenous communities because I tend to appreciate more the differences they have in between than their similarities. It is quite often...you quite often see political forces using...trying to generalize indigeneity or forces that do not necessarily live or participate within Indigenous communities, you know? This is quite often the case that people talk about indigeneity or Indigenous practices as a general umbrella of practices and I think that's a mistake because...especially because of the...how diverse the region or at least America - or at least South America - , I can speak with more property to...between South America. South America, it's incredibly diverse, especially in its ecosystems, you know, these biological regions are very, very different, one from the other. And that produced different knowledges, also, that are situated within these very specific ecosystems, right? With this, I would like to say that I don't really work...I don't really study the Indigenous world in general but rather I've been entangled with two Indigenous nations. One, it's the Uru-Chipaya nation which is recognized today as a nation that is located in Bolivia, very close, Chile and Bolivia are neighbouring countries. And also, I've been entangled with the Selk'nam nation at the very end of the continent, there is thousands of kilometres in between. Those are really two worlds that I work with, and before continuing maybe I should say that I was born in Chile, in Santiago, my skin is Brown and I don't have Indigenous memory in our family, we don't have Indigenous memory, even though most of the population of Chile have Indigenous blood in their vein. But it is very common, in all the countries that I shared, that you find races that have shared territories with or that steal territories from original peoples, that their Indigenous blood has been erased, forgotten because it has been greatly stigmatized. So none of us, the mestizo population in Chile, have no memory of their past. And I also, I'm one of them, maybe I can tell you a little bit of what I do in the desert in Bolivia, in the Andes, this thing that I've been doing for five years. This might be a long story, I'll try to make it short. I was living in Europe for a couple of years, I was following the usual trajectories you will see an artist should follow, producing, working in highly developed countries and working in Berlin. And I was very depressed and sad at some point, and I managed to save some money and I decided to not to work for a year and I traveled to...back to Chile and I bought a car and I drove to the North. I've never been in the North before and the North of Chile...and the North of Chile, it's desert. Not all the North but most of the North, it's becoming more and more desertic and I arrived to...first to Atacama which is the driest area in the world with the clear skies. This desert climate is pretty extreme and I arrived there driving my car and I ended up in the middle of nowhere, very close to the Atacama Salt Lake in a place called Chulin which is a very, very small land that was at some point hundreds of years ago occupied by humans, but now it was only occupied by other beings. There were no humans there. However, there is another community, a living community called

Peine that are the custodians of this territory. So I met them and I told him about this land that I just visited, that it seems so beautiful. And I get to know them and I asked them at some point if they will allow me to live there for a while and that was beautiful, how open they were to my story, to my sadness and to this very innocent and probably irresponsible desire to live there, mostly because I felt welcomed. But I didn't know much about this place and after a while they said, "Yes, we will allow you to have you there". Nobody has been there for so many, so...for such a long time and actually, after a while they would call me the President of Chile. (laughs)

Aouefa Amoussouvi 25:02
(laughs) Of an empty nation.

Ariel Bustamante 25:08
So I lived in this land for almost a year and every two weeks I drove my little car to this town, to Peine. I'll tell them about what was happening, how I was feeling. I'll buy some provisions, some groceries, and then I'll drive back to my little hut and that was one of the most beautiful time that I ever had by myself. At some...after spending a couple of months there, I started to wake up at different hours. I didn't have any pressure to do anything, to produce an artwork or to do anything than just feel, than just be attentive to what was around me. But after a while I started to recognize things with more precision. I started to recognize the birds, the foxes, the lizards, the stages of the moon and the passing of winds, and so I started to wake up at different hours and one of the hours that was more important for me, that I felt the most welcome, was between six and seven because between six and seven...

Aouefa Amoussouvi 26:44
...in the morning?

Ariel Bustamante 26:45
...in the evening. I...a wind passed always between six and seven. A particular wind will flow from the West and he was beautiful. I will expect the pass of this wind, I will walk with it and I will do these sort of things for most of the time that I lived there that organize my waking hours and my day. So at the very end of that year, I decided to leave, pack my things, talk about my experiences in Peine, share those experiences with them and walk up, upwards to Bolivia. That region, now it's Tarapacá but it's very close to Atacama. That whole region was called Kollasuyu, you know? They would rename after country, speaking countries but before, this whole desert belonged to the countries of Bolivia, Peru, Argentina, the North of Argentina and Chile. But now it's all divided. Bolivia is very close, right, and when I arrived to Bolivia, a very special woman had a drink with me and told me that we should work together and she was currently working with the Uru-Chipayans, Uru-Chipayan nation. So she invited me to go with her and she couldn't... I think in that time she couldn't go. So she told me that I should just go by myself, and when I arrived there, this is still the desert, right, in the high land. This is almost 3000 meters above sea level.

It's very high, it's pretty extreme. Once I arrived there, I realized that the same wind passed there between six and seven.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 29:08
Does this wind has a name?

Ariel Bustamante 29:10
Yes, but I can not tell it to you. I'm not going to share it now, today. Yeah, this was one of the terms that I asked my collaborators before having this interview. I asked for permission and we decided to limit this knowledge and to limit what I was going to share. We can talk about these reasons later. But then I…when I realized that the wind passed between six and seven, I met German Lazaro which is an Uru-Chipayan writer, musician, constructor, so many things. He's one of my dearest mentors and he said, "Well, this is not the wind. This is a wind and it's a person". And from then on, I was…I realized that I was brought there by this wind. This is what German Lazaro told me and from then, I dedicated all my work, these five years, to accompany and to learn from and to walk with this wind. And maybe the last thing, to go back to your question: I work with these two nations, right, that are, if not 4000, more than 3000 kilometres apart, you know? This is the desert, very hot, very dry and Karukinka is at the very end of the continent, close to Antarctica. There are icebergs over there. It's extremely cold and humid and wet. So when I first met Hema'ny Molina, this Indigenous Selk'nam woman that is leading the fight for sovereignty in Karukinka, I brought a feather, a flamingo feather. I have one with me, I can show it to you, that I found outside of my house in Santa Ana de Chipaya and you find them everywhere because flamingos fly there and live there. And I took this feather and I showed it to Hema'ny and I burned the feather. I burned it with her and that ceremony was based on the waniu, which is a very broad ceremony in which the Indigenous people of the Andes embellish their animals. It's a form of celebrating your animals, for them to have good health. And…but this particular ceremony, it's in Isluga, not very far from Santa Ana de Chipaya in which you burn the feathers and you make your cattle, your sheep or your llamas to smell it, to smell the smoke because when you smell the smoke, you integrate the abilities of flamingos to be together and not to get lost in the way because flamingos are very well organized beings, right? They work as one. So I did this with Hema'ny so our collaboration…we don't get lost in our collaboration and then we found a book of birds and we realized that the same species lives over there. The same species flies and lives over there. And then we, me, not only myself but also Hema'ny and Don German Lazaro, the Uru-Chipayan writer and musician, we understood that the feather, it's what connects us, that create this bridge between these two extreme lands, through air and through smoke. So we have used this feather, this spiritual technology, in different ways. We have…they haven't met each other yet in person, Hema'ny and German, but we have done things together online using the feather, these feathers. Yeah, we have sung together, we've done many things together. So this is how I ended up understanding my role in this, my commitment to these two nations and to my work as an artist in general. Yeah, so it's very specific.

It's very specific and I don't know how I could integrate something else that is not...that doesn't have a living bridge, you know, or an existential bridge.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 34:56
Yeah, it's beautiful. I am very thoughtful right now, I'm thinking that...or I mean, like, from what you just said, I understand that walking with...for example, like, one of the nation means working with the human but also with the ecosystems that also integrate the land and the animals and the wind and everything. And I'm thinking about, also, what you said at the very beginning, saying that the Selk'nam nation was qualified as dead nation, I think, in the 60s or the 70s. And I wonder, was this announcement made by anthropological or ethnographic or political people and I was wondering that, historically, ethnography and anthropology are also very closely linked with othering and dehumanization of some group of human on Earth, especially, like, People of Color. I'm like, for example, Black people, Brown people, Asian people have been displayed in human zoo in the late 19th century and early 20th century, as well, that many body parts and objects related with their culture has been stolen or acquired under sometimes a bit weird condition and are now stored and displayed in Western museums. Could you - you already talked about - but could you maybe, like, say something about what is the relevance of the...of ethnography, of such academic discipline nowaday?

Ariel Bustamante 37:09
Yeah, yeah. Yeah, deep questions. I would like to begin to try to answer that question invoking someone that knows much more about this than me, and that is one of my mentors and dearest friends, and she is Anna Maria Ochoa Gautier which is a Colombian ethnomusicologist, writer, thinker, and she's currently writing a beautiful essay that hasn't been published yet about the history of the gramophone and how is it that it helped to consolidate comparative psychology or ethnomusicology whilst also being complacent with the process of colonization. She begins by describing how Thomas Edison, even before the gramophone was used as a tool, as a practical tool, was envisioning the gramophone as a tool to capture the essence of the Indigenous communities that were condemned to die or that were condemned to be changed into or to absorb Western habits, right? And that involved to understand sound in a very specific way, understanding sound as a phenomena, that it's able to capture the essence, you know, that capture the essence of a particular sort of sonic practice, right? And in those days, those recordings were made to be transported to Europe and be studied there without...for all the people, or for all...for the scholar world to investigate the sonic practices without ever, ever stepping foot on this land or having any kind of relationships with this land or with the people that were producing those sounds. Sound was understood more as an autonomous object and that was the only thing that was important, that could contain all the information, everything you need without really paying much attention or much value to the context or any other material that could help you to understand the reason behind those sounds, if they were medicinal, if they could be recorded, in which conditions they were recorded, what was the service of those sounds, and so on. So in this text, I think she is making a line between the beginning of this attitude

for ethnomusicology as a process that is still happening, that ethnomusicology from its beginnings has never really tried to use the gramophone as a tool for survival. It was more accepting the disappearance, right, and just capturing, just capturing this moment. So it was never committed to that and this is...in my experience, this is also the case in the...at musicological archives in the world, that when you use...and this is also the case for the Selk'nam people right, that in the 60s, when Anne Chapman came from United States to record - according to her - the last Selk'nam, the last shaman, Selk'nam shaman, you know, and this recording of Lola Kiepja became one of the most famous reproductions of a world that doesn't exist anymore, right? And that declaration was very, very, very rough for the Selk'nam descendants, right, that are still alive and even today, the rights of those recordings don't belong not to the Selk'nam nation but to the families of Lola Kiepja, that I believe I told you before, the Selk'nam songs are made by families. So the rights and the audio distribution of the Selk'nam songs has to be within a certain family, you know, and in contrast, now you can listen to these recordings everywhere...

Aouefa Amoussouvi 42:49
...without the permission...

Ariel Bustamante 42:52
...indiscriminately shared in YouTube, Spotify, completely decontextualized to the function of those songs and yeah, and that's very sad. But this is only one part of the picture. I think, to me, it's only one part of the picture. This, I think, still happens in certain ways. It's very common that Amerindian communities have no rights over these recordings that are usually kept or stored alone as cold objects on toxic wax cylinders, as I heard once Dylan Robinson being concerned about...which is a...Dylan Robinson is a *xwélmexw*, North American thinker and writer and they...yeah, as I mentioned before, collected as dead objects in Western museums, completely disconnected from the sources or from these territories. I think this still happens, but there are other initiatives such as the one of Beverly Diamond that bring these recordings back to the communities, regardless if they are recognized in the more standard ethnomusicological world as living nations. She just takes the recordings with the people that she found in this land and see what happens. And there is another, I know personally, another initiative or another way of doing these things that are different. And I'm thinking of Claudio Mercado which is a Chilean anthropologist that has recorded and followed the three traditional singers from the South of Chile and he has worked with these three musicians for decades and he has a beautiful article that describes his relationship with them over the years and how they start dying. It's described how they begin to die one next to the other, and one of them, before dying, told him, "You should learn the songs, you should keep the songs and share them". And Claudio asked, “Why?”, and he said, "Because you need to remember me after I died". And those kinds of relationships between authorship source sharing other distribution storage have different methods, right? And I think we also need to consider the more intersectional questions behind these institutions in the world. I recently met Claudio for another project we are doing and I started by asking these questions that we are discussing right now with him, and he was, like, well,

wait a minute. I am the archive because the institution that I work with, the Pre-Columbian Museum in Santiago, it's so precarious that everything that happens within the management of archives or the ethics behind it has to do with my own efforts and without almost any, any, any resources. So he has been very precarious, very precarious, and I think this should be compared...we shouldn't compare that easily, you know, these massive institutions such as the Humboldt Forum and these very, very small archives in very small institutions in other contexts and in the non-Western world.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 47:34
Yeah. Yeah, I'm thinking about the concept of collapsology or...for example, like, in the West there are...

Ariel Bustamante 47:43
...the end of the world.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 47:44
...yes, the end of the world and the fact that some people are saying that humanity and the current world are threatened by the climate change and the climate crisis. But for other community, other nation, I'm using the word “indigenous” also, we know that there is also, like, some problematic aspect with this, but for other people in the world, the end of the world already happened. And I'm also thinking about this: What does that mean to record the disappearance of people? Why not trying to save them?

Ariel Bustamante 48:32
Yeah, exactly, yeah.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 48:33
What do you want to do with the...? Yeah. I also understand that the song are food. I'm like, singing for the peatland, it's like, also, feeding and that a song also need to be sung by the community, the wind, the sound of the wind, the sound of the birds. Everything also is part of the song, meaning that to extract the speaking words on the record and put it in the cold, empty white cube room...yeah, what's the function of this? Especially when we also know that the culture of the people and the people, their survival, is totally dependent of the fact that they have to be recognized alive and they have to be given the right to stay on their land?

Ariel Bustamante 51:25
But I think I can comment something very short about this. I remember that we talked...that I asked you about this recording and how, for how long it will be kept, be available at the website. And then you just said, "Well, maybe forever". And then...this is the idea that we have for the digital technology, right, that it can be stored in a pristine, clean state forever. But we forget to realize what sustains that technology, which is the Earth. And this is what...this is how Ana Maria Ochoa also uses the concept "song earth":

song, it's indivisible from Earth. So if the earth collapses, the song collapses, too. I just wanted to…thinking about a very short comment. I heard this from a Bolivian philosopher called Rafael Bautista. I'm not sure if I endorse completely with his thought, with his project, philosophical project, but I heard him once talking about the Pachamama which in the Andes means…well, “Pacha” means a lot of things, means time, means Earth, means whole, how the cosmos works, and “Mama”, its mother, right? And he was saying, against this grim ideals of the future that the Earth will be fine with us, he was saying, "Do we think that…do we really think that our mother or the Pachamama will be happy without us? No, she probably won't be happy without us because we are its children. We are the children". And I think that's a very beautiful, beautiful concept because it creates another, an additional responsibility, you know, that it's an emotional responsibility within our mother. She's a sentient being that also has affective emotional bonds with the people that live from her. So yeah, I think it's a more positive view that give us more hopes in the sense that it tells us how important we are, you know, for others.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 52:42
Some more food for thoughts, you give us a lot. I would like to hear a little bit more from you about your practice of working with sound, of using patience, listening as active tool for your artistic practice. But I also see your work very interdisciplinary, meaning that: Is it activism what you are doing, is it art? It's not very clear and it's actually not important to define and put it in a box. And I'm thinking that in the Western cultures, there is a higher emphasis on maybe talking, results and listening. I think listening is also maybe viewed almost as a passive action, something you do passively or happen to you, the sound entering your ear. So I would like maybe to hear about what does…how do you practice active listening? And I see this as a decolonial practice, yeah, to challenge the Western culture that puts maybe higher emphasis on visuality and clarity.

Ariel Bustamante 54:16
There are many questions. I don't know if I can connect all of them in one answer. But I don't think that I like the idea of reducing one sense as having the ability for us to be decolonized. I think it's…it could be…it's a very dangerous project, a deterministic project that I think it's not really…I don't have those very isolated experiences with sound and listening that had to do only with a particular sense. Maybe a big difference in regards to sonic practices, in the Andes at least, is that you rarely see someone sitting, listening music for aesthetical or contemplative reason, or people going to a concert sitting and watching someone playing. It's usually more something about sustaining a particular way of living, a particular habit to sustain a particular cosmology, to mediate between realities, to heal someone or is connected to a broader…to broader practices. It's never only about doing music. It's rarely…you don't see that quite often. And in regards to my work: Now, I'm using coca leaves to talk with you, right? I'm chewing them, I'm holding them in my mouth and with the hopes that the words that I'm speaking to you are also spoken by the coca leaves. So what I'm…so it's not completely up to me, but I'm also speaking through the wisdom of the coca leaves. So everything in my world has to do more with sharing responsibilities and sharing

talents and listening with others. I wouldn't call it activism per se, yeah. Oh, maybe I can tell you something more about this difference between speaking and listening that could be very special. I've been drawing a map for a long time in the desert which are crucial when you walk to understand the dangers of the desert. The desert is a very dangerous place for many reasons, you know? It's pretty, pretty hot. It's pretty dry. A lot of people die because of this. A lot of migrants, unfortunately, are dying right now crossing the desert. It's also very dangerous. There's a lot of crime in it, there are crime routes and when I follow and I walk with the wind I have to be careful of this. But there are also spiritual dangers, right? And those spiritual dangers are also connected to certain beings such as mountains, rivers, lakes and things that you should...that could collaborate with you and things that could be dangerous for you. There is another part of the desert that I don't know very well. It's Pampa Aullagas, but a friend of mine, Juan Fabri, he is a Bolivian artist, he told me that he once was walking in the desert, finding a woman she needed to talk to and he couldn't find her house. This is flat, this is like a sea of sand and he couldn't find her house and he was a bit concerned. And at the...at a distance, he could see a mirage. He could see, like, something that looks like water and he said he remembered that she was living close to the water. So he just walked towards the mirage. After a while, he realized that he was lost. That was not the right direction. So he turned back, he walked around until he bumped into this woman, and she asked him, "Where have you been? I've been waiting for you for hours". He said, "Well, I got lost". "Why?". "I don't know, I thought that I saw your house at a distance. But it was just a mirage". And she said, "Oh, yeah, that happens. For that not to happen, you need to speak out loud". "And to whom?", he said and she wouldn't reply. But there's...there are always things listening, there's always...it seems that there's always the possibility for someone to be listening to you. But in this place in particular, and in those conditions, it was important to be speaking out loud, you know, for someone to, I guess, to listen to you or to guide you to where you want to go. So this is how I...this is how I've been mapping the right things to do while being in the desert, yeah, what defines speaking or listening.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 1:00:03
You already mentioned the name of many of your collaborators and people you...no, it's great, it's great because I'm asking all the guests of the podcast series a question about knowledge production. And yeah, the Western knowledge production narrative creates genius characters who seem to come up alone with great ideas, and so to highlight the continuity and collectivity of knowledge production, I asked all the previous guests - and I'm asking you - to maybe give the name of someone who influenced and inspired your work.

Ariel Bustamante 1:00:56
Yeah, maybe it's important to talk about the elephant in the room which is Alexander von Humboldt and his name, you know (laughs). His name is such an important figure for ethnography and the access to non-Western world, and I recently read just a beautiful, beautiful article from an Ecuadorian historian called Jorge Cañizares and the name of the text is already amazing. It's called "Screwing Humboldt and

his Hagiographers", you know, which is the people that write these best-selling books about Humboldt. And he starts by questioning these ideas of Humboldt as being this...being opposed to slavery while he will buy a slave for five years to carry his barometer or being funded by slave traders, but that's just the beginning. Then he focused rather on his studies of Humboldt's studies in the Chimborazo, this famous vertical ecologies, the different ecosystem depending on the altitude that was based on already established Spanish American scholarship. In those days, in Colombia, there was already antiquarians, botanists, librarians, cosmographers doing a lot of work, doing precise work that were actually laughing - people like Francisco José de Caldas -, laughing about these beautiful drawings that were very imprecise, very imprecise. Nevertheless, he became this figure that was glorified as someone that "created" nature, that was able to describe a so complexity and with so beauty, this "New World", by the efforts of his own intelligence, without really ever recognizing the help and the studies of many people, of a lot of people. And this keeps happening when you build a huge institution under his name. Where is the rest? Where is the rest? It is a very, very, very sad and unfortunate, I think, denomination. In the article, you find a beautiful quote that he constantly repeats, a beautiful mantra that is, "In the West, you find ideas. In the South, you find tarantulas", right? This keeps repeating. But nevertheless, you also find very strict hierarchies in the Andes, at least in the Andes. You will find that, you know, these Indigenous communities will have democratic, very horizontal structures but they don't, don't, don't, they don't, and sometimes they seem like very strict, very binary. However, they are much more complimentary, creative, and flexible. For example, it's very common to find a leadership within a small community that has a lot of power and...but then each one of the members of that community will be the leader at some point. And there is another more radical example that you're always relating to other beings and...such as sacred mountains like the Illimani that I can see from my window and the Illimani has an authority and dominance that is way higher than any other human and he will always be on top. And those asymmetrical relations of authority are vertical and very strict, very, very tough, tough to break, sometimes, yeah, or at least here in the Andes. But to recognize my mentors, I mentioned a couple of them during this conversation such as German Lazaro, Uru-Chipayan writer and musician, Hema'ny Molina, poet and artist, fighter of the Selk'nam rights and Selk'nam recognition in Tierra del Fuego, Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier, Bernardo Rosso which is an artist and musician and healer, one of my most important mentors here in Bolivia, also Maria Galindo and "Mujeres Creando" which is an activist, artist and one of their greatest voices that has such much power in the political agenda in Bolivia through her pretty unique creative work. There's also amazing people here, most of them in Bolivia. Alison...such as Alison Spedding or Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, of course. And I would also like to include my grandmother, my great grandmother, which I never met but she was an undercover artist and musician. Her name is Rosa Elena Maria Aguilar and I believe we have a very, very special connection between us.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 1:07:03

Could you recommend one concrete action that people could do today to enact decolonial ecology?

Ariel Bustamante 1:07:14
I don't think that I understand what ecological decoloniality really means but I could...in my experience, the world is constantly sending us calls or invitations. It's always making signals, you know, for good or for or worse. It's very seducive, it can be very seducive. One needs to be careful. But I think since the world is constantly speaking, I'll suggest to pay more attention to those calls, you know, regardless of where you are. Regardless of where you are, I think they will always manage a way of speaking and telling you things that could give you something new, you know?

Aouefa Amoussouvi 1:08:19
What, yeah, what are you working on at this moment and where can our listeners follow you and find more information about your projects?

Ariel Bustamante 1:08:31
I'm here in the...close to the desert. I keep working with German Lazaro and the Uru-Chipayan community and this wind. It's a life commitment, I believe. So I'll be working with them for many years, I don't know when it's going to end. Sometimes it's a very concerning thought not knowing when it's gonna end. But this is how relationships work, I guess. You never know when they start. You never know when they end. So this is what I can say about what I'm doing right now. I have a little website that I wrote myself and I'm very proud of the fact that I managed to learn JavaScript and built my own website. It's called pafn.net or my name, arielbustamante.com, I think. It's a very small and intimate place. I put some things in there. Yeah, I don't have social networks of any kind. I think I only have WhatsApp. So yeah, that's the only way that you can get some of what I'm doing and what my collaborators are doing, so yeah.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 1:10:06
Yeah, yeah. Well, people have to come to Bolivia and visit you.

Ariel Bustamante 1:10:13
Please! Please come.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 1:10:16
Yeah. Yeah, we're coming to the end of this podcast episode. I'm extremely happy and thankful for your time and all your input and stories and we will, yeah, we will have show notes. So we'll put the name of all the people you mentioned and I also know that on the website of “Hol-Hol Tol”, people can also listen to a few songs that was recorded with Selk'nam people, and...

Ariel Bustamante 1:10:56
Yeah, well, they are too...maybe I should explain that a bit further. They are...what I explained to you about the pavilion, it's one thing that cannot be shared, we don't actually have access to it anymore. But

there is another part that is public, that you can share as much as you want and that part is called “rumors”. And you can find them in the website that is turbatol.org. and you can find them and listen to them. There are six, I believe, or seven of them. You can do whatever, you can share them however you please. Yeah, those are meant to be shared.

1:11:38
(“Rumor” playing)

Aouefa Amoussouvi 1:15:00
So it's the end of the afternoon in Berlin. I think that it's maybe, like, around noon in Bolivia. So I say goodbye and I wish you a great rest of the day.

Ariel Bustamante 1:15:15
Thank you so much, Aouefa. You too have a wonderful evening.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 1:15:20
Thank you!

Ariel Bustamante 1:15:22
Bye bye!

Aouefa Amoussouvi 1:15:25
Concept, research and moderation are made by me, Aouefa Amoussouvi. Sound production: Annelien Van Heymbeeck. Thank you to Sias Wöbling and Lucile Bouvard for ideas and exchanges. Thank you to Julia Richard and Alondra Meier for the assistance, and Michael Dieminger for the invitation. This podcast series is commissioned by 99 Questions at the Humboldt Forum.

SHOW NOTES – Episode 4

Ariel Bustamante:

https://pafn.net/

Turba Tol Hol-Hol Tol:

https://turbatol.org/

Selk'nam People & Culture:

https://turbatol.org/selknam-culture.html

Fundación Hach Saye:

https://hachsaye.com/

Hema'ny Molina & Fernanda Olivares:

https://hachsaye.com/conoce-a-nuestro-equipo/

Uru-Chipaya Nation:

https://www.coopi.org/en/uru-chipaya-an-ancient-community-born-from-the-water-and-the-wind.html

Greifswald Moor Centrum:

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Karukinka Natural Park:

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https://www.chile.travel/en/where-to-go/macrozone/north-and-the-atacama-desert/

Challa/Ch'alla Ceremony:

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Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier:

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Lola Kiepja:

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Rafael Bautista Segales:

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For a pre-colonial perspective on Pachamama as an androgynous being, see Isbell, Billie Jean, "De Inmaduro a Duro: Lo Simbolico Femenino y Los Esquemas Andinos de Genero." (1997). In Mas Alla Del Silencio: Las Fronteras de Genero En Los Andes, edited by D. Y. Arnold, 253. La Paz: Biblioteca Andina.

Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, "Screwing Humboldt and His Hagiographers" (2019):

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Illimani Mountain:

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Alison Spedding:

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Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui:

https://globalsocialtheory.org/thinkers/cusicanqui-silvia-rivera/

Dylan Robinson:

https://www.dylanrobinson.ca/

EPISODE 5 - Feminist and Creative Approaches to Atmosphere and Environmental Knowledge-Making with Dr. Sasha Engelmann

Synopsis

As our podcast series is coming to an end, we meet with Dr. Sasha Engelmann, geographer, artist and lecturer in GeoHumanities at the Royal Holloway University of London. She talks with us about the military history of atmosphere and weather surveillance technologies. We also learn about alternative feminist and creative approaches to atmosphere and environmental knowledge-making. Together, we then take a closer look at her collaborative work on design justice tools for citizen-led air quality and pollution data in Villa Inflamable, or the "Flammable Town", located next to the largest petrochemical facility in Argentina. Besides, we hear about Sasha's and Sophie Dyer's project „Open Weather" exploring DIY satellite ground stations and the role of the (gendered) human body in weather and atmosphere imaging. Lastly, we explore the challenges of deconstructing existing power dynamics between teachers and students within universities.

Speakers

Dr. Sasha Engelmann, Dr. Aouefa Amoussouvi

Aouefa Amoussouvi 00:33

Welcome to the *Decolonial Ecologies* podcast series, a podcast series in which we talk about the history of ecology, how it became a scientific academic field interconnected with systems of power and oppression. Colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, Eurocentrism and heteronormativity have been applied to produce ecological knowledge that claims to be universal and objective. Therefore, museums and universities have contributed to shape and justify an extractive way of inhabiting the earth. In each episode, you will hear a researcher, an activist or an artist who challenges the Western mainstream narrative on ecology with intersectional feminist and queer perspectives, perspectives from Black, Indigenous and People of Color. We will discuss decolonial practices in both the Global South and the Global North to more ethically respond to the current climate and social crises. Besides individual and citizen actions, we will also take a look at the responsibility of museums and universities to deconstruct the colonial heritage of their own structures. For example, we will discuss how restitution of colonial artifacts by museums can be seen as a part of the climate and environmental justice agenda. I'm Aouefa Amoussouvi, I'm your host for this podcast series. In today's episode, our guest is Dr. Sasha Engelmann. Dr. Sasha Engelmann is a geographer, an artist and a lecturer in GeoHumanities at the Royal Holloway University of London. She's also the author of the book "Sensing Art in the Atmosphere - Elemental Lures and Aerosolar Practices". Yeah, so today our guest is Sasha Engelmann and with her, we will talk about feminist and creative approaches to atmosphere and environmental knowledge-making, design justice tools for citizen-led monitoring of air quality and weather patterns, the feminist satellite imaging project called "Open Weather" and how to deconstruct power structure in atmosphere and air knowledge making

within the academy. My first question is: How is the atmosphere in your current location? We are Friday, December 16, of the year of 2022.

Sasha Engelmann 03:28
Thank you so much, Aouefa. It's really nice to be on this podcast with you and I would say that the atmosphere is very clear. It's cold, the sky is very blue and I'm situated here in London. I live in a third floor flat overlooking the neighborhood of Camberwell and normally, I can hear the trains that pass by right next to my flat every couple of minutes but today I can't because in the UK, we're experiencing many, many strikes. So train strikes, postal office strikes, university academic strikes, and so the atmosphere that I'm experiencing right now is very much informed not only by the meteorological weather but by the sort of political weather of the UK right now.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 04:21
I'm having, like, a little image of what could be now your surrounding which is very nice. I'm like, in terms of light, of color, of temperature but also, like, yeah, what's the social climate around you.

Sasha Engelmann 04:36
It's very beautiful as well because we've had snow earlier in the week and so the tops of the houses and the outlines of balconies are all still dusted with snow, but it's kind of mostly melted so it's kind of like someone has sparkled light over different parts of the city. It's very beautiful.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 04:56
Yes, I'm like, this is...it seems that it's one of these very nice winter days in comparison with...I'm, like, currently in Berlin where it's very gray. It's also very cold and also icy but it's very, very gray and yeah, so I think that I have, like, another kind of winter climate. Yeah, I think that this first question is for me, I'm like, maybe an introduction for one thought that I had which is that for a long time, I think as a child and I think that this is the case of, I would say, like, the mainstream culture and maybe, like, you could tell us a bit more but maybe also, for a long time, the scientific community...for me the sky was empty. I knew that sometimes these clouds that, like, weather might fall from the sky but as a child I think that I have this image that the sky, the atmosphere is empty. And so I wanted to ask you, I'm like, first, how crowded is the sky? And since when did people started to see the atmosphere not only as this empty space between the Earth and the space but as something that, yeah, which has a specific composition and that has different dynamic fluxes and also that evaluate over time?

Sasha Engelmann 06:41
Well, I think it's no accident that I'm a geographer of the air because since you started out speaking about your memory from your childhood, I wanted to offer that. When I was a child, I grew up in Los Angeles with very severe asthma and one of the reasons why I'm fascinated by the air is, I think, related to the fact

that as a child I was very viscerally aware that I couldn't always have it. So I spent many hours on certain kinds of machines that would enable my body to breathe better and more easily, and so having this experience of air actually as a medium that, you know, without which one cannot live, one cannot survive, was very present for me, I think, quite early in my childhood. But speaking more broadly, air and atmosphere are fascinating because they're largely invisible and intangible to us until, again, either we experience the absence of it or we see things being moved by the air, so trees swaying in the wind or a heavy storm affecting the buildings. And interestingly, that relates to the history of the interest in air academically because - and here, I'm overgeneralizing - but a lot of scholars point to the fact that the interest in air and atmosphere can be connected to the learning in the early 20th century that air could be weaponized to kill. So in...I mean, it's a very famous case study pulled by Peter Sloterdijk that in the trenches of World War One was the first moment where gas weapons were used by one army against the other he says, fight the French against the Germans. Many people also critique Sloterdijk - and I join them - by saying that, actually, gas warfare is much older and was used as a means of colonial suppression far before it was used on the battlefields of Europe. But people say that it was this moment of realization that it's not a gun that would kill you but it's your own breathing of gas, and it was that realization that really prompted both military and industrial interests and atmosphere and the widespread growth of the industry of chemical warfare and weather modification and cloud seeding, as well as the rise of what we know today as atmospheric science which was also of course linked to the tracing of radiation in the atmosphere from nuclear tests. So in many ways I'm telling a very particular story here, but I think it's not unfair to say that academic interest in the air relates to our understanding that it can be weaponized.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 09:50

...which is quite shocking. It's a strong beginning for this podcast but we are already directly in the middle of the subject of power structure in the making of knowledge production and yeah, and I think that I also had the question about how, when did the scientific community started to understand that the atmosphere, the composition of the atmosphere, has been changing over time? I'm like, I know about the work of Lynn Margulis. Can you tell us maybe a little bit about how did the scientists understood that the composition of the air of the atmosphere is changing?

Sasha Engelmann 10:39

I think this takes us into more positive and uplifting territory in the conversation. So again, I'm not an atmospheric scientist by training so I really can't speak to the history of atmospheric science. But one of the...one of my opening lectures in a course I teach at Royal Holloway University of London is about how the atmosphere was not always the one that we breathe today. And the atmosphere in the early days, the kind of young earth atmosphere, was composed of very different chemicals than the ones that we have in our atmosphere today. And my understanding is that there was something called the "Great Oxygenation Event" which happened about 3.5, I believe, billion years ago, which was when a form of life emerged called cyanobacteria and these cyanobacteria began to basically translate and transform what was then, I

believe, a very sulfuric atmosphere into an oxygen based atmosphere. And they really kind of chemically engineered the atmosphere on the scale of the planet which is a wild idea. And there's an anthropologist, Elizabeth Paganelli, who says that humans are the afterlife of cyanobacteria breath. So we, you know, we are the outcome, we are the consequence, we are the leaders of the breath of the bacteria that emerged so many billions of years ago. And I think that another important point about the atmosphere is that even if we have a very different composition of bacteria and life forms on earth today, the atmosphere is always exchanging and interlinked with life. So life produces atmosphere, atmosphere produces life and one cannot separate these things, even if we often find it difficult to perceive the air as important.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 12:36
Yeah, yeah. And I think that this question of, I'm like, the composition of the atmosphere is changing but also that the atmosphere and the air can be, like, used as a weapon. I know that you are a senior lecturer in GeoHumanities and from what I understood, GeoHumanities is bringing together geography, arts, the arts and humanities, also looking at which are the geopolitical, maybe, aspects of the knowledge of geographies? And I would like you to maybe, like, comment maybe a little bit more...or maybe, like, explain, what is GeoHumanities?

Sasha Engelmann 13:22
Thank you for that question. So in my understanding, the GeoHumanities is as old or older than geography because geography, if we trace it back to the ancient Greek tradition - which is the tradition in which I work here in London and in the West -, geography means earth writing. So back in those ancient days it meant literally the study of any mark or trace or pattern or network or scalar distribution of things on the earth, how things are written and inscribed into the earth. But back in those ancient days, geography was not necessarily a social science or a science for humanities, it was actually all these different things. People would write poetry about earth writing, people would study the mathematical shape of the earth and that was also geography. So in many ways there were different disciplines combined in this early idea of geography which then, through the Enlightenment period, at least in Europe, disciplines began to get much, much more narrow and geography became a very specific thing, even before the enlightenment. And so in many ways, the...it's a very, very long story to be saying in very few words, but the GeoHumanities is trying to make space once again for the intersection of geography as an understanding of the planet and of space and of place and of people and of mapping and all of these things, and putting that in conversation with the arts and humanities because our composition is that one cannot understand the planet and its richness and its vibrancy and its...and the kind of ways in which it is written without an arts and humanities based lens. And so all of my work fits into the GeoHumanities, both what I do research and also what I teach.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 15:39
I know that you started in October of this year a two-years project called "Advancing Feminist and Creative Methods for Sensing Air and Atmosphere". So I would like to talk a little bit more with you about this project. I think that my first question is maybe, what do you mean by feminist principle? What does that mean in the context of GeoHumanities and also, why do we need them? I sense that if you specifically say that you are using feminist principles in your work, it means that they are absent of, maybe, the mainstream traditional geography.

Sasha Engelmann 16:26
If it's okay I think I might just preface that briefly by saying a little bit of background about the project. So it's a two year long grant project, as you said, called "Advancing Feminist and Creative Methods for Sensing Air and Atmosphere" and...but it very much emerges from about ten years of work I've done previously where I've been studying air, atmosphere and weather primarily through the lens of art and creative practices. And that took shape first in my PhD research which was an ethnography in the studio of Tomás Saraceno in Berlin, not far from the Humboldt Forum. And I spent four years working in Tomás' studio learning how to both work with him but also make sculptures in his studio and he, as many people may know, is invested in this idea of floating cities or cloud cities. So he makes sculptures that can fly using only solar energy and, you know, leave the so-called “white cube” of the gallery and enter the stratosphere and perform different sorts of relationships to the atmosphere, perhaps more ethical ones, ones based on not extraction and domination but on, like, moving with the air that is around the earth. And so in my PhD project I learned a lot about, I guess, the value and the power of artistic methods for understanding air and atmosphere for and also entering here in atmosphere is very, you know, because you were asking earlier, what's in the air? So I learned a lot about what's in the air through literally launching things into the air, you know? We would launch sculptures from Berlin and they would fly to Poland or they would fly other places and we would track them. So we had to know all kinds of information about what is in the air before putting something else in the air. And I can return to that later but I think coming out of that PhD project where I was thinking very closely with the work of a particular artist and then thinking about how I had learned within that work that there were also a lot of questions being asked about how we make knowledge on air and atmosphere, how we know air and atmosphere but also a lot of critical conversations about how that happens. So I had learned that it's very common for air quality scientists to parachute technologies into communities, extract data, leave the community, publish work about it and raise up in their status as academics. I have learned that, you know, the atmosphere is highly surveilled by government technologies. I had learned that there are things like satellites that are constantly tracking weather systems and hardly even...it's hardly even known to people on the ground but they are constantly sending images of people's houses to various institutions and we used to use a lot of weather satellite data and imagery in our work in Tomás Saraceno's studio for sculptural and creative reasons but I was kind of becoming aware of the different, I guess, knowledge hierarchies, controversies, ways of doing things, ways of knowing air and atmosphere. And so the the whole point of the grant is to

think about, okay, so if there have been some traditional ways of knowing air in atmosphere that have - I think it's widely acknowledged - produced hierarchies, extracted things, benefited largely elite academic institutions and not communities, generated regimes of surveillance...if these, if this is the kind of traditional way of working, how can we change that? How can we craft alternative ways of knowing air and atmosphere? How can we craft alternative ecologies of practice in knowing air in atmosphere? And so I...my hypothesis in this project - which is not answered yet because it's only, it only began two months ago - is that we can combine creative and artistic methods with intersectional feminist principles to produce more ethical and equitable and community-based knowledge of air in atmosphere. So to answer your question now about the role of feminist principles in the project, I'm thinking with feminist ideas, specifically on equity and the role of the body and the politics of location. And in brief, feminists have been really important in emphasizing how embodied knowledge is just as important as quantitative or technical knowledge and understanding our environment. So as an example, rather than coming into a neighborhood with air pollution sensors to make, you know, a spreadsheet of numbers of lists of air pollutants in a neighborhood, why don't we also use our bodies? Like, why don't we also think about intergenerational memories of air, how we feel when we walk into the neighborhood? So that would be how a feminist lens certainly complicates a traditional mode of operating and measuring air quality. Or another way of thinking about it would be: We know that - rather, I know that and I'm sharing with your listeners -, that the history of monitoring weather has largely been dominated by powerful governments and powerful military institutions, one of the largest players of which is the US government which created a organization called "The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration", or NOAA, in 1970, precisely as a tool to map and capture the atmosphere over North America, the better to colonize it. So the idea was that if we can predict hurricanes, if we can predict droughts, if we can map and totally capture through the highest amounts of surveillance of the atmosphere what is happening over North America, we can... we have a leg up, we can better dominate the space. And so the history of knowing the weather is a history of dominance and coloniality and oppression and the use of satellites who are, you know, these machines orbiting around the earth that we cannot see that are there without our knowing it, with the earth from afar in what Donna Haraway calls "the god trick"? So that's the history of weather monitoring, how might we complicate that and so one of the projects I have in the in the grant, which is called" Open Weather" that you mentioned earlier, is about trying to use or subvert these tools of satellite earth imaging to produce other kinds of knowledges of the weather.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 23:23
Do you have any idea of how many satellites are currently, like, in the air?

Sasha Engelmann 23:32
I don't. I would guess it's in the height, it's in the many, many thousands, Aoeufa, I wouldn't, I... I think that's a really good question because it also reveals that the satellites with which I work are only three. There are only three satellites with which, with whom I work in this project "Open Weather" and that I'm

trying to use to complicate…I know, ideas of how we measure and monitor weather but there's thousands and thousands and every year, there are launched more thousands of satellites. And there are satellite geographies and orbital geographies that most of us, again, have no daily understanding or sense of.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 24:20
Yeah. Could you maybe tell us more about your three, about the three satellites you work with? And I think that with this you could also explain us what are the… what's the particularity of them compared to other?

Sasha Engelmann 24:41
So in the project called "Open Weather" which is a…it's a feminist artistic experiment in imaging and imagining the earth and it's whether using DIY tools…my collaborator and I whose name is Sophie Dyer, we work with three primary satellites and these satellites are operated by the institution called NOAA that I mentioned earlier. So they are…their names are Noah 15, Noah 18, and Noah 19, and very simply, that just means that Noah 15 was the 15th weather satellite launched by NOAA, Noah 18 was the 18th. NOAA 19 was the 19th. So the numbers just refer to the order in which they were launched. But Sophie and I have, Sophie and I kind of co-founded "Open Weather" in relationship to these satellites because these are very special satellites in that they, I think, are some of the only remaining satellites that transmit images to Earth in an analog format. So yeah, and this will be a little bit, maybe technical for your listeners. So to explain this, it basically means that the images collected by the satellites are not sent in digital packets that require, like, decryption codes to be unlocked, but rather they are…the images are actually encoded into a sound that is inscribed or held in a radio wave and so the image actually is the radio wave and it is the sound, there's no separation between the radio wave and the image. And these satellites are sending constantly images to Earth in this analog radio-based format. And Sophie and I found it very interesting and alluring to work with these satellites because the nature of their transmissions allows us to find noise and to see interference and to capture all kinds of other strange things and images other than the images themselves, if that makes sense. The…one of the first things we did in "Open Weather" was a performance called "Open Work, Second Body" where…it was started during the first COVID-19 lockdown in London and Sophie was in her flat in North West London, I was in my flat in South East London and you know, we were in the same city but we couldn't meet in physical space because of COVID. So we did a performance, where we livestreamed ourselves, both of us on our balconies, simultaneously receiving an image from the satellite NOAA 18 as it orbited for 11 minutes over London. And our kind of proposal was a little bit that, you know, in this time of the weather of COVID and the weather of the pandemic, we are sensing that weather of the meteorological atmosphere through the eyes of the satellite. But in doing so and precisely because we were stuck in our flats, the images that we received have all kinds of gaps in them. And they have all kinds of pores and blank spots because it was simply not a great place to be receiving a satellite image…we were blocked, our kind of line of sight reception from our antennas was blocked by buildings. There were all kinds of other obstructions in our

flats that stopped us from receiving a beautiful clean image. So the resulting images are these very noisy, kind of blurry spectral artifacts of us receiving images of a satellite from lockdown. And so this is one of the examples I guess in which we try to subvert or play with or experiment with the satellites from NOAA to ask different kinds of questions about how we see the earth and how we know about earth's weather.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 29:06
I had the chance to attend one or two of your workshops of "Open Weather". So I know what you are talking about, you know, this antenna and the noise and resulting images. But for the listener, could you maybe describe what's the technical setting? And yeah, you can describe, like, how long is the antenna? How much does this antenna cost and because I know that you're on a mission with your collaborator, Sophie, on a mission to train as many people as possible into this DIY protocol, in order to create as many as possible new images and new representation of the atmosphere, of the weather, from a more personal perspective than the one than we have on Google Maps that are very smooth and kind of, without any noise, without any discontinuity from one position to the next.

Sasha Engelmann 30:14
Well, it's wonderful to be in conversation with you, Aouefa, because you not only took part in an "Open Weather" workshop at Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart a couple years ago, but you've also contributed a lot to the project through doing performances with me to participating in the latest kind of planetary imaging event that we did in "Open Weather". So I think the listeners should know that you and I have an active conversation and I'm very humbled that you've been part of the project actually so far. But I think it's a good question because I think it's always important to bring things back to the basics and back to the what we're actually talking about. So what we're actually talking about here is a DIY satellite ground station setup and what I mean by that is a free or cheap radio antenna that either you can buy or you can make at home from everyday objects like coat hangers and... or copper wire. And you can connect this antenna to a laptop using a radiofrequency cable which just looks like a kind of black TV cable and it plugs into your laptop using a device called a dongle which looks kind of like a USB stick. And what happens is that when a satellite was passing overhead and after, of course, taking a few measures like being able, like, knowing when the satellite will come and how to point your antenna, the antenna receives the transmission of the satellite through the radio spectrum and that signal gets sent through the radiofrequency cable into the USB-like device called a dongle which translates the radio kind of mechanical information into a digital signal that can be interpreted by some free open source software that you can download on your computer. So in total, this is a ground station that costs anywhere from 30 pounds to 100 pounds depending on whether you buy or make your own antenna. And it's a really wonderful, I would say, an improvement in what's possible with radio. So, in the past what was needed was always a very large transceiver to receive radio waves, often very fancy antennas. And nowadays, through developments and software, we can make very cheap, very accessible radio stations. And so, what happens during a satellite passes, one sets up a satellite ground station, the satellite crests either the North

or South horizon, it orbits above you and if you have an antenna called a turnstile, you have to track the satellite through the sky as it moves. You have to imagine the satellite tracing an arc from North to South, over the sky. And as the satellite is moving you can hear the sound that it's sending you to your laptop speakers. There's a bit of a feedback between you trying to see the satellite, you listening to the signal holding your antenna, moving your body, it's very dance-like and choreographic. And at the end of the 12 minutes of the satellite pass, you should be left with the audible recording of the satellite or a sound file, actually, of the satellite signal which then can be interpreted into an image. It's a very poetic practice and very kind of...I always thought it was very much like sensing a ghost because you can feel the presence of something, you can feel the presence of the satellite through its radio transmission but you can't ever see it. So it is kind of like being in touch with a ghost.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 34:30
I'm like, I remember from the experience I had with you that because one has to hold the antenna in the direction of the moving satellite, it means that we have to move our body, meaning that my body was an extension of this antenna which was receiving the signal from the satellite, I don't know, like, many kilometers up in the sky. And I remember my body was part of these operatives of sensing and measuring, I'm like, the weather in the sky and I think it's something that is....I know that it's something that you challenge in your practice, to also bring the human body as part of the measuring tool of geographies and environmental study. I know that in the other episode with other guests, the notion and the concept of human separated of the nature is something very recurrent in the Western concept of ecosystems. I'm like, nature, animal are there, human is somewhere else and I really like that you put the human back in the nature. But I know that it's something which is very criticized, that sensual measurement are not precise enough. I think it's a claim of the...maybe the scientific community. Could you maybe, like, say something? How do you respond to, maybe, this critic?

Sasha Engelmann 36:17
It's interesting that you make a parallel between some of the conversations around human and nature separations and the role of the body in an “Open Weather” performance or in a satellite ground station because I think if we're being specific, what's happening in a DIY satellite ground station performance with the human body is precisely, as you say, the body is becoming an electromagnetic apparatus. It's actually becoming part of the receiving system, so part of the antenna so we can no longer separate technology from the body. And...but simultaneously, there is this invisible medium of radio which we become aware is constantly moving through entities, both human and non-human and technological. So I think there's actually several binaries at work there in the DIY satellite ground station, not just human and non-human or human and, like, elemental but also body versus technology and I would say also gendered body versus technology. So in histories of science and technology, often the use of technologies, the use of tools was very often coded as male and Sophie and I see this very often when we talk to people that also do radio experiments like us, who are called radio amateurs or ham radio operators, who are

overwhelmingly white men over the age of 50. And one of the spaces in which we have been critiqued is precisely in those radio amateur spaces where our proposal that the body and more specifically our female bodies are an operative part of a DIY solid ground station has been seen as threatening, I guess not only because of that body-nature or body-technology binary but also because of the gender associations with technology. So linking to the other question you asked about the role of embodied sensing in making knowledge, I think more broadly in relation to quantitative sensing, I think it's actually receiving a lot of attention now. A lot of people are asking, okay, when I study the water pollution in a particular site, I don't just go there with sensors and water pollution devices. I also do interviews with the community by understanding how people have tasted different kinds of water or, you know, what they do to cook with their water? Do they boil it first of all, kinds of things like that. So I think these sorts of questions are rising but I think the contribution of feminist thinking has for me been, who does the data serve? How is the data produced? And what is missing from environmental datasets? So if we ask those questions, all three of those questions at once, so the answer to what is missing might be, okay, embodied knowledge, central knowledge, intergenerational knowledge, which seems to be kind of being asked by some people right now or being answered by some people right now. But if we also ask, how do we produce environmental data and who does that data serve, then it becomes more complicated, then it becomes more about how we embed ourselves as researchers in the struggles of communities and serve the needs of those communities and not only serve our academic objectives to understand something scientific.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 40:25
I would like to jump on a project you told me about and I read a bit about. You are doing a project in Argentina in a place which is called "The Inflammable City". And could you maybe, like, explain a little bit what your goal with this project? And also what's the challenges of making a project and acquiring data, you being affiliated with the university in London which is, like, in the Global North? And what are the, maybe, power structures that are always in such a project and how do you deal with them?

Sasha Engelmann 41:11
This is the...this is one of the key questions of the next two years for me. So the answer I'm going to give you is a very partial and fragmentary and probably poor answer to that question because, again, it is a big part of the...my current research project which I've only just begun but yes, so I've been working for a couple of years in collaboration with an anthropologist in Buenos Aires. Her name is Débora Swistun and Débora grew up in the town of Villa Inflamable or "The Flammable Town" which is not far from the center of Buenos Aires and it's situated next to the largest petrochemical facility in Argentina. So we're talking about an industrial facility where I think there are something like 40 companies from Shell, a major oil and gas company to waste incinerator companies to manufacturing companies, all of whom pollute the air, water and soil in different ways. And from my understanding, the name “Flammable” for this town also originated from a fire on an oil tanker called the "Perito Moreno" that was...that happened in the 80s. So an oil tanker kind of caught fire on the canal right next to the town and it looks like the town was on

fire. And so this name, “Flammable”, stuck and Débora and I had been speaking a lot about air and atmosphere. Débora wrote a groundbreaking ethnographic book on environmental racism and activism in the town. It's called "Flammable: Environmental Suffering in an Argentine Shantytown" and her book really shows that, you know, we cannot always use narratives of kind of like activists rising up successfully against evil corporate actors when we're talking about community involvement and environmental racism. And there are these kinds of very heroic stories told very often, especially in the North American context about environmental racism. But her book and her ethnography shows that there was what she calls a "labor of confusion" happening in the town. Toxic uncertainty where through the actions of both the government, the local municipality, journalists and politicians, there were many kind of fake claims about the nature of the environment in the town made toward residents of the town so that some residents of the town believed that they lived in a toxic place. Some people fundamentally didn't believe that, believed that their water and the air was clean. So, to come to what we're doing together, Débora and I had been speaking a lot about the town and I was really inspired by one passage in her book where she talks about the weather of Villa Inflamable which is an event that she describes where she is in her mom's house and she is trapped in her house because there has been this fog that descended over the town and it smells so bad that one can't go outside. And she's complaining to her mom and I think her mom says like, “Oh, that's just the latest emission of the waste plant”, and Débora says something like, “Yeah, that's the weather of Flammable”, it's the literal weather. So weather again, weather is not rain, sun, cloud. Weather are the emissions of these industries. So through talking with Débora about this town, Débora and I arrived at this idea that we would like to collaborate on a project to monitor the air or sense the air of Flammable because the soil had been studied, the water had been studied to some extent, but there had been no project really to this point that measured the air quality. But through conversation, we realized that we wanted to do this in a way that privileged the role of residents, that made sure that the knowledge that are the data coming out of this project was actually controlled and owned by the citizens. And that early on in the project we collaborated with the Aeroscene project, which was launched by Tomás Saraceno because the Aerocene project uses solar lightener sculptures to lift different kinds of things off of the Earth's surface. And so early in our project, there was a bit of the idea that we could maybe think about or dream about attaching air pollution devices to Aeroscene sculptures and float them in the town, and not only map the air on the ground but also the air on a vertical axis up into the atmosphere which we speculated could also show us about the sources of some of these emissions coming from this nearby petrochemical facility. So what has happened so far is that we've and when I say we, I really want to make very clear that it's primarily been work done in Buenos Aires by Débora, by Joaquin Ezcurra who represents Aerocene, and by a team of local students, programmers and scientists and anthropologists. I am really the only member of the team who's not in Buenos Aires. So they have done a large majority of this work, but the team has prototyped two air pollution monitors in conversation with the community of Villa Inflamable who had all kinds of input on to how the monitors were designed, how they were, what were their interfaces like, how they could be used, how heavy were they? What kind of LED lights flash when something is toxic or not, all kinds of....there were all kinds of user design and user experience steps

in the making of these air monitors. And at present, there are two working air monitors that are the first two prototypes and the tentative goal of the next two years in this grant project is to use some of the funding that I've gotten from the UK to further advance the measurement of air quality in this town to build more air quality monitors. But more importantly, I think Débora and I really want to develop a model of air quality sensing that is feminist, that is focused on design justice, meaning that the design of things - in our case air pollution monitors - doesn't exacerbate existing power inequalities but rather mitigates against them, so the ways in which design can actually serve the needs of communities rather than undermine communities. So what would a model of air quality sensing look like that was feminist, that was designed justice-orientated, that was interdisciplinary, that involved multiple methods, both from the Arts and Sciences, and that had a strong set of protocols in place where the outcome is fundamentally controlled, not by me, the, you know, the Global North academic, but by people living...who are most proximate, who are in the weather of Flammable. This is the dream but let's see, I can't promise what will succeed in the end.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 49:03
I'm like, when I'm hearing this, I'm thinking that...I'm like, one of the very sad effects of the global warming and the current climate crisis is that many of the populations that are the most affected are really, like, already marginalized and also many are located in the Global South. And I found so important that you describe one example of a study where the knowledge is not produced centrally but there's a decentralization of the knowledge because you use, I would say, more humble, maybe, measuring tools, meaning that you can also, like, train the community to measure by themselves what is happening in their own community. And I was...also wanted to ask about, maybe, about the challenge, maybe, like, to also...is your goal to publish those data? And I'm aware that in the academic fields, these are big problems, that many of the data that are published by academy, meaning by....with the taxes of the citizens are actually not available to, I'm like, to the mainstream community. And so what will you be doing with this data?

Sasha Engelmann 50:37
I think it's a great question. I also want to preface my answer by saying that we are very careful in the grant to understand - especially because Débora is on the team and Débora grew up in Flammable - that not to only tell a story of this town as a story of damage, where a place in the site has been damaged through pollution and toxicity and oppression and labor confusion but also, to equally tell a story of resistance and struggle. So since the 90s, even the 80s, there's been a lot of environmental activism in Flammable. There was actually a big victory when, through decades of work and a lot of local effort, the Supreme Court of Argentina ruled that the companies that site next to or that are sited next to Flammable, must clean up their actions. One of the problems has been, however, that it's very difficult to enforce that Supreme Court ruling. So I just wanted to kind of temper this, I guess, story about this place with not only this narrative of damage, but also quite an important and compelling narrative of struggle, of collectivization and of political pressure. And also then from that, to say that it is, you are right, that we

are trying to...there will be some dimension of training, I think, local residents about using the air quality monitors, but we're also not only interested in training them as also them training us and learning from them. So I mentioned earlier that we're thinking about air not only as a quantitative number, so air is not only a number for us, air is also an experience. It's about how people inhabit their daily atmospheres, the ways they maybe avoid particular streets because it's dusty, the way they think about their relationship to their press. So we're interested in the lived memories and experiences and practices of people and the relationship to air and atmosphere. And then to go into the question of what will this produce? It's a....this is a question that I actually can't answer right now. So initially, we had thought to open source all of our data and our tools. There's a bit of a tricky conversation happening right now about what that would mean for the capacity of residents to operationalize and control the results of the project. So open sourcing something can often mean that it can be taken, to put it very bluntly, or it can be, frankly be yet stolen, right? So we're thinking very carefully about, like, okay, what are the possible harms in open sourcing everything? How might we want to produce repositories, for example on GitHub which is a very prominent online archiving system for data, that are open to particular people and communities but not open to others? So these are questions that we don't know yet, Aouefa, but we're working on it.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 54:39
We are getting slowly to the end of our episode. So I would like to know: You are a senior lecturer at the University of London in GeoHumanities and I wonder how you practice to deconstruct this power structure as lecturer in the content of what you are teaching but also in the relationship between you and your students?

Sasha Engelmann 55:15
So the first thing I do is doing my own homework. What I mean by that is doing my homework on exactly where and what I'm teaching and so, to gloss over a lot of history, I think you actually began this podcast kind of gesturing to the colonial history of different academic disciplines. But, you know, the discipline of geography was very involved in colonial expansion and especially UK geography. So teaching geography in the UK which has been historically one of the greatest colonial powers and whose geographers were so central to colonial expeditions, you know, to producing, you know, high quality maps, to producing even paintings of the places that were visited by explorers. But more specifically and thinking about today, I'm kind of aware of the administrative colonialism of the UK Government. So what I mean is we can think about how Caribbean people were dispossessed of their right to remain in the UK in what's often called "the Windrush scandal". We can think about the self proclaimed hostile environment of the UK, so a hostile environment to keep out foreigners. We can think about what Sara Ahmed calls atmospheric walls. So Sara Ahmed writes about how universities and higher education institutions in the UK have these atmospheric walls that make these universities comfortable for some bodies and not comfortable for other bodies. And again, we're back to the invisibility of air and atmosphere, one doesn't have to see something for it to have an effect. And Sara Ahmed talks about the experience of walking into a university classroom

and really feeling like she wasn't supposed to be there. And so how did the invisible, the kind of engineered atmosphere is of higher education institutions, welcome access to some people, i.e. white privileged English people and deny access to other people. So this is the context in which I work. More specifically, geography is extremely white. So, more so than other disciplines, the kinds of students who choose geography in their secondary school exams, the kinds of students that choose geography to study at university level are overwhelmingly white privileged English students. And there's many kinds of papers on this. So with all of this, all of this context, how does one teach geography in a classroom then? To be brief, because I think I could talk about this for an entire podcast, one of the things I do is make it very clear to my students that no matter where they come from, no matter what grade they got in secondary school, no matter what skills they have or what passions they have, geography is for them. So it's a discipline, it's not a system for them, they are part of it, they're very much already geographers. It's a discipline that should serve them, too. Another thing I try to emphasize is that we are not absorbing geographical knowledge as if it's like held in books and/or resides in my brain as a lecturer. We are making geographical knowledge together. So we make something, something kind of alchemically happens in the classroom, that is geography. That is...cannot be contained in a textbook or in a book or in an article or in my brain. And all of my classroom teaching is interactive and for that reason, actually, none of my teaching is really recorded because just for various reasons, it doesn't make sense to record interactive sessions. So I really don't, I believe to stay away from monotonous lecturing as a tactic of teaching. Third, I think related to that is...I make a point to set up a kind of collective protocol in the classroom so that we are humble. And that applies mainly to me, that I recognize when I don't know something, and I don't pretend that I know something when I don't. But equally, I ask my students to be humble and be very clear when they don't know something because when we don't know something together we can...that becomes an opportunity for learning, not the kind of block to learning. And finally, in my work I put a lot of emphasis on the speculative. So it's the kind of traditional idea of an academic classroom is one in which you absorb information, you memorize, you inhale, you get things. It's like, you're kind of getting something that you can kind of possess, right? And then you're supposed to regurgitate that in an exam where you have to put it out on paper, right, as if you kind of become this vessel of possessed stuff, but then you have to show what you've possessed or what you've captured. And I think that's, like, fundamentally inappropriate and an actually quite poor model for knowledge and for learning. So in my classrooms, we speculate, we do a lot of kind of imaginative exercises, we try to activate knowledge. So in my model, I think knowledge is only knowledge when you can activate it, when you can not put it to use but to complicate it, to nuance it, to live it, to show how you can work on it in your neighborhood, or your community or your next big project that you're working on. So my classes are speculative. We're always reaching for something that we cannot grasp but I think in trying to reach for that thing, we're getting somewhere that we wouldn't have gotten otherwise. And I think I'll leave it there, but I think that...I guess the last thing I'd say, Aouefa, is: I have learned over the years, and I've only really been lecturing for five years now so I should be clear I'm not some wisened professor at this point, I've only....I'm a great early career teacher but I've learned that, you know, I have as much to learn from my students as they have to

learn from me and I acknowledge them in all of my writings, that when they have offered the ideas that I've been cited, I acknowledged that and so yeah, I have many, many amazing students who, without which, who I wouldn't be who I am.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 1:02:06
Related with this, I'm actually, like, asking all of my guests: The Western knowledge production creates isolated genius characters who seem to come up alone with great ideas. To highlight the continuity and the collectivity of knowledge production, yeah, I would like to ask you: Could you give us maybe one name or a few names of people who very strongly inspired and also influenced your work?

Sasha Engelmann 1:02:40
The person who is very present in my mind because I just saw her last night is Harriet Hawkins. And Harriet Hawkins is a professor of GeoHumanities at the university where I work and she has single-handedly basically opened up this horizon of the GeoHumanities, I think, for me and for other scholars. So she founded the Center for the GeoHumanities at Royal Holloway where I work. She was part of the editorial board, setting up the journal "GeoHumanities". But more than that, she - and this is very important I think - beyond her academic work she is a profoundly important mentor, not just for me but for, like, so many other people. And actually, I think her mentorship is part of her academic, I don't know, not her influence, but the way that she forms a coherent kind of knowledge system or how she has built a community around an idea. So the amount of, like, intellectual but also pastoral and personal energy that Harriet has put into people, including me, is vast and has really taught me about the ethics of being an academic and of, you know, passing down what I can to the people that are, you know, in my classrooms. So someone should - sorry, everybody, not someone - everybody should check out Harriet Hawkins. You will find many publications.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 1:04:19
We will put her name in the show notes so people can check her work. I'm also asking all my guests: Could you recommend one concrete action that people could do today to enact decolonial ecology?

Sasha Engelmann 1:04:39
So this is a tricky question to answer because one of our first conversations we had before I came on this podcast was about the word "decolonial". And I follow the work of people like Max Liboiron but also Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang who are Indigenous scholars and philosophers who say that decolonization really means the repatriation and the giving back of land and resources, and cultural artifacts and lifeworlds to the communities from whom they were taken. And so decolonization means something very specific and they make a difference between decolonization and anti-colonization or the anti-colonial. And doing anti-colonial work for them may not mean the actual giving back of things, but it may mean not reproducing the colonial norms, knowledge systems and knowledge frameworks that have enabled

the possession and extraction and capturing of Indigenous and marginalized people's lands, resources, concepts, life worlds. So if we follow that definition, I would position my work as anti-colonial in the sense that I don't think I can fairly say that my work is contributing to the repatriation of land and resources. It may do in the future but right now, I cannot honestly say that that is what I'm doing. So I aligned myself with, I guess, anti-colonial and specifically feminist praxis which doesn't reproduce particular kinds of norms. So, hence why I think maybe my question back to you is: Are we trying to decolonize ecology? Are we trying to produce anti-colonial ways of thinking in ecology?

Aouefa Amoussouvi 1:06:57
It's a really good question because I've already recorded a few episodes of this podcast series and you are the first that actually, like, asked me what I mean with decolonial ecologies. I haven't been trained in African studies or postcolonial studies so I think that I basically, like, learn about those words, I would say, through my private research and I think that to me, I'm using probably, like, anti-colonial and decolonial, I put them together in "decolonial". I think I'm not doing so much difference between the two because I think for me, if...you need to become aware of the problem in order to stop reproducing it, in order, also, and if you're not reproducing the problem, meaning that you need to find new way or alternatives way and to me, it's something that...you cannot do one without the other. I'm not expecting you to do everything on your own, but I think that it's a kind of machinery that some people might have work which is focusing more on showing, bringing awareness about neocolonial structure and dynamics. Some other people might come up with protocol about how to stop reproducing those power dynamics. Some people might look at history and maybe research and do work that's more focusing on archives in order, maybe, to bring light about part of histories that have been erased. And I think that everything has to happen. I like the word decoloniality. To me, decoloniality is... it's a tool, it's...with decoloniality, I like to look at other, maybe, power realities or, like, future realities where we have finished the work of deconstructing colonialism and neocolonialism. And from this perspective of these realities where colonialism doesn't exist anymore, I'm looking back at our current situation and look what do we have to do and what is missing, and so on.

Sasha Engelmann 1:09:38
I love that our speculative idea of, you know, decoloniality as something that we're working toward. I can actually try to answer your question if you give me another chance. So I think it...since I'm learning a lot from you in this conversation and I think I'm arriving somewhere I didn't, I wasn't arriving before with my thoughts. But if I had to answer your question about how do we decolonize ecology, and for me, I guess that means decolonizing the ecologies of the air, specifically. And so, you know, I couldn't help but think what is more colonial than using air which is the very medium and means that sustains life and enables us to live? What is more colonial than using air as a means of...whether it's using gases in warfare to oppress people or whether it's extracting data to ratify the status of elite academics, or it's using air as a means to surveil territories, right? So in many ways, like, through air, I think we problematize

colonialism in a particular way I think that maybe other mediums or forms of ecology don't, precisely because air is this life force. So if we need to decolonize the ecologies of the air, I think we need to radically reframe our relationships to air not as a kind of afterthought or a forgettable medium or something we only notice when it's toxic or it fails us or it's disruptive. Rather, we have to develop alternative, probably more equitable, ethical, situated, embodied collective relationships to the air that undo these traditional ideas of, like, capture and domination and pollution and possession through which air has been the medium of colonization.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 1:11:55
I'm inspired by one sentence in the introduction of your book, we'll put the reference to it on the website when we publish the podcast, is every time I breathe in to become aware that the air that enter my body and my lungs and that are also chemically on the molecule and even become part of my body, this air is a result of the cyanobacteria that has oxygenated the atmosphere, but this air is also the result of all the patriarchy, the colonialism, the capitalism, meaning all the pollution and contamination that has been happening for the last hundred and thousands of years. And that those concepts, those power dynamics can't be seen as some intangible concept but actually, like, they are present in the air that I'm breathing every day, every second. So thank you for making me aware of this. Maybe one last question: What are you working on at this moment? Do you have anything to add to our today's discussion?

Sasha Engelmann 1:13:28
Well, it's been a really beautiful afternoon speaking to you and again, I've learned a lot during this last hour. I guess what am I working on? Maybe one thing I would like to leave as a speculative, tantalizing, future, dreamy moment for the listeners is that in "Open Weather", which is the project around imaging weather patterns through DIY satellite technologies, we've done two what we call "nowcasts" where we try to image almost the whole planet through asking all of the members of "Open Weather" who are now numbering close to a hundred people at different parts of the world to capture satellite images on one day and send us their images along with field notes on weather and climate change and we stitch these images together into a sort of collage of the planet on one single day. And we've done two of these nowcasts, and what we're working on in 2023 is going to be a - for lack of a better word - real-time or living nowcast. So rather than capturing planetary weather on one day like a snapshot, we're working on an open source infrastructure for a constantly changing, updating living version of this. So whenever someone from the network submits an image to our "Open Weather" archive, it would appear on this living weather map. And so…but in thinking about this, we're also thinking very hard about, you know, does this living weather map look like a globe? Does it look like Google Earth? Does it look like even the earth, you know? Like, does it look like something totally weird or alien or very fictional actually? So we're really trying to play with this border of scientific and pragmatic and speculative and fictional in producing an image of the earth made by people, so not made by, like, scientists…

Aouefa Amoussouvi 1:15:45
...machines?

Sasha Engelmann 1:15:46
...but made by everyday people, exactly, that will tell a different kind of story of the earth but also earth's weather and the ways in which weather has impressed itself and continues to impress itself on human life.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 1:16:03
Wow. Yes, I'm very much looking forward. I was, I think I was part of one of these nowcasts. So I will, yeah, I will get my antenna out of under my bed, ready for the next one. Yeah, Sasha, it has been my pleasure to have you as my guest today in this episode of *Decolonial Ecologies* hosted and funded by the 99 Questions at the Humboldt Forum. I'm just, like, again, I would like to express my gratitude for your time and your work and all this knowledge and I wish you...I don't know what's the weather now after one hour talking in London, but I hope that...I wish you a great end of the day.

Sasha Engelmann 1:16:57
Thank you. It's been so wonderful to be in conversation with you, Aouefa, and to answer your question, it's a very golden sort of sunset moment over here, so a very beautiful kind of atmosphere to leave this conversation.

Aouefa Amoussouvi 1:17:09
It's still gray in Berlin. (laughs)

Sasha Engelmann 1:17:12
Oh no. (laughs)

Aouefa Amoussouvi 1:17:12
Bye!

Sasha Engelmann 1:17:14
Bye!

Aouefa Amoussouvi 1:17:17
Concept, research and moderation are made by me, Aouefa Amoussouvi. Sound production: Annelien Van Heymbeeck. Thank you to Sias Wöbling and Lucile Bouvard for ideas and exchanges. Thank you to Julia Richard and Alondra Meier for the assistance, and Michael Dieminger for the invitation. This podcast series is commissioned by 99 Questions at the Humboldt Forum.

SHOW NOTES – Episode 5

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