Interview of Te Maia Wiki by Tate Oliva
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Te Maia Wiki is an indigenous environmental organizer and current student at Yale University. She has worked in climate justice organizing, attended international and UN Conferences on climate change, and worked in narrative collection and archive building.

00:00
TATE OLIVA: So I'll just start off by prefacing this, thank you again so much for joining me for this interview. It's part of an archive that Duke and specifically my class is creating on youth activists since the 2010s. And it's going to be used in the archive for research and education purposes. I will make a transcript of the interview and then I will send that to you and you can make any edits, cut anything, and change anything. You have the final word on anything that goes into the archive. So you don't have to worry about anything being misconstrued. And there's nothing specific that we're looking for, it's just to hear your stories, hear your thoughts, your opinions, and honor and gather knowledge of what it's like to be a youth activist. I feel that story is not told a lot and not valued, especially in these academic settings there's there's an age kind of barrier there, I guess. So that's kind of all I have to say about that. And if you have any questions, please let me know. And it's not formal or anything. So to start it off, I'm kind of curious if you could talk about what activism has looked like in your life and what being an activist or being an organizer or that kind of thing means to you.

TE MAIA WIKI: Yeah. So I think when I talk about my story, it really starts before me.
02:24
My mom often says I come from a long line of renegades and I feel that's very true for me. So on my mom's side, I belong to the Yurok people from the village of Rekwoi, which is R-E-K-W-O-I in Northern California, where the Klamath River meets the Pacific Ocean. And then on my dad's side, I belong to the Ngāti Porou and Te Aupōri tribes, of the North Island of Aotearoa or New Zealand. So coming from a double indigenous background, my family really guides themselves on the belief that the wellbeing of the land and the water is intrinsically linked to the wellbeing and health of the people, and maintaining that balance and having a reciprocal relationship is really important.
03:21
And so when it comes to living our lives, my great-grandma would never say that she was an activist. My great-great-grandma would never describe herself as an activist. And they were all organizers and resistors and did a lot of things. My great-uncle, I think he was 13 when he was first arrested for fishing right below his house on the Klamath River. He sued the U.S. government, the case went to the supreme court, he won that which reaffirmed fishing rights

for indigenous people. But in his head, yeah that was a cool thing and he was like, “What else am I going to do, I was going to bootleg fish anyways.” And then my mom works a lot in philanthropy and understanding how we change systems to improve the health of rural communities. Growing up, my parents worked full time jobs, but I would go to community meetings with my mom, go to city counvil meeting with her, go to these spaces and sit in on meetings when I was a little kid just coloring in the corner but that still influence the way that I understand system desing. Especially coming from an indigenous community and reservation that I see as so resourceful, bountiful, and plentiful, and that is where my spirits connect to and its my most faforite place on earth. And at the same time, this place also has some of the worst health disparities and poverty and unfair education systems. And so in that way,that’s really encouraged me to see sytems and then be curuoisuu about who needs to be held accountable. So guiding with that, for a long time I didn’t think of myself as an activist, even now I use the word organizer more and that feels more aligned with me even though I could also say actiuvist. I just heard organizer more growing up. For me that means participating in so many random community organizing events, especially when it comes to water rights, fishing rights, voting rights, and recognizing the intersectionalities between all of those. Sorry that was kind of a ramble

OLIVA: NO! That was lovely and gave me so much to think about and I really appreciate hearing that story. So you mentioned your family, how is family continuting to be a part of your work? I know you and your sister have done community organizing together? What is that like, to do that work as a part of your family? How is organizing as a family?

WIKI: I feel really grateful because I grew up going to protests and I grew up going to marches and mostly that was just my grandma taking me to things and telling me to get into the car. And that is just how I thought the world worked. So I also feel really grateful to have a family whose guiding me and sees change making happen in different ways. I have a huge family lots of cousins and aunties. One of my aunties is an attorney whose worked direcrtly on damm removal and is doing amazing things like advocating for water rights from an indigenous perspective in UN spaces. I have some autnitews who are doing field research and science and studying and project managing. So very hands on work. I have a semi-retired auntie who goes to conferences and shares things that she did in the 80s to help establish our tribal government. I think what makes me really encouraged is that activism, organizing, advocating for your community llooks different for everybody and there’s many different ways to do that. I also feel really greatful because I see this work as very expansive. This type of work can manifest in many different ways and that is exciting to me because I also know the value of storytelling, documentary making and film making and those have all been important for me. It has been nice to exposed to all these different kinds of work. On another level though, its good to learn

from past generation. With each generation of my family, I have four generations of women, (me, my mom, my grandma, and my great grandma) and we are often all together, and each of them have experienced a very different time and movements. They will give me advice or help me learn from things they've already learned. Its empowering because it also reaffirms "these are the people I come from". These people who believe in protecting our fish, protecting our water. Another funny thing about it being a family thing is that all labels are lost. I mentioned this before but I still have a hard time of thinking it as "this is activism work" No this is just how I spend time with my grandma. I spend time with my auntie and of course she's giving a speech at some random event. I show up with my grandma and of course she ends up leading a women's march in our community. Its also fun because I have two younger sisters Kiya (15) and Ani (9) and I've been roping them into this kind of work. When Kiya was a freshman in high school last year, and I was a senior. I was involved with Rogue Climate[1] which is a social justice climate justice centered non-profit in our community in the Rogue Valley. I roped her into helping organizethe climate march and our campaign around renewable energy and trying to phase out fossil fuels. I think it was really good for her in an educational sense to learn about the work being done in our community and also be connected to other resources and people who are doing this kind of work.

OLIVA: Yeah wow, I eealy love the idea that youre touching on, No its not a formal separate thing that is activism. Its almost more of a part of life and a its how were spending out time. Its interesting, in academia and in our class weve touched on the fact that the idea of activism…what does that really mean? Formal activism isn't really a thing in a lot of cases, its more protecting what you love or its advocating for what you care about. I love that perspective its something new for me to think aout

WIKI: Yes. And for Yuroks too, the way that my family has phrased it. I just keep thinking about how I interviewed my great uncle who has now passed (Raymond Mattz) who won the supreme court case. And when I asked him what did he do to celebrate after winning he replied, "What do you mean? I would have kept fishing, this is what my people have been doing forever." Just inherently being Yurok, it makes me think, what else would I be doing other than eating salmon, speaking my language, going to the beach and harfesting seaweed. All of those things are inherently politicized in some way. So how else would I be spending my time.

OLIVA: Yeah its like that what you do. Along this line, who ispires you most in doing what you do in your life? Who are what do you draw inspiration from?

[1] A climate justice non-profit based in Southern Oregon

WIKI: That's a good question. I come back to Fenoa always. Fenoa is a word in Te Reo Māori[2] the language of my dad's people. It means land but it also means placenta, because when you're born you bury your placenta in the lands you belong to. Because its nourishing for the land and its good nutrients, but also spiritually you're always connected to Fenoa. There is no separation.

Im in this class right now called Black and Indigenous Ecologies rigtht now which I love, and I read this essay from Vanessa Watts[3] who is an indigenous academic. She has this phrase, 'place thought' which is essentially this framework of thinking from non-colonial thought, which is just that the bodies of the river and the land are not separate from the human bodies. The biophysical, the spiritual, and all the other things are connected. And you really cant separate the two. That's what Fenoa encompasses which is really exciting because theres no word in the enligh language like it. And so sometimes when people say things I just go back to "Fenoa" Because I don't hyave to explain "why do you care about the earth" No I'm not just a tree hugger from northern California who loves eating granola. I actually LOVE these trees because they are me. I love the redwoods because they are me. I love the river because it is me. When it comes to that, I feel so inherently connected that advocating for the land or the water is self protection and prevatative and protection of my community. And then I also recognize that all the things I just mentioned are intersectional with anything else so even if its not "climate justice" seeming actisim, it is. For example advocating for housing justice is the same. Racial justice, social justice, it is the same. It is the same and you cant have one without the other. So I think that's the guiding principle and Ive touched on this but the women in mty life are the most inprising people and their strong feminine energy. Ive only been surrounded by strong Waihine, strong women who are outspoken and can be crazy in the best possible ways. My mom, my granda, my great grandma, my autnies. And hen also the youth around me. So mych if the work I do is behind the scenes, working on campaigns or educating myself about community issues. But when I'm going to protests or marches or participating in actions. I've been in a few different UN spaces including Biodiversity conference COP15 in Montreal last December and then the UN's COP26 (the annual climate change conference) in 2021. In both of those spaces, although supposedly for climate, are filled with people who do not believe in protecting the land in the same way that I do. And so those spaces were really difficult because I was in international climate policy making spaces that are very different from the way that I believe and operate. In those moments, the youth around me were the most uplifting and

[2] A language spoken by the Māori people, the indigenous peoples of mainland Aotearoa, New Zealand

[3] Dr. Vanessa Watts is a professor of indigenous studies at McMaster University in Canada

encouraging thing. I think it takes courage and its brave to do this work, and its scary actually its very scary being a 16-year-old in that conference space when there's lobbyists being like "you're wrong" and you're like, "well I'm 16, am I wrong?" So to have other youth, indigenous youth, youth of color from all these different place agreeing to work on things together, to have and hold spaces together, to talk things through together, going to each other's communities to learn from each other. That is the most fulfilling thing.

OLIVA: Thank you for that. And I can only imagine that being in those spaces, that's the only thing that can hold it together and provide support against those big companies and big people that are in opposition.

WIKI: Yes. And sorry I feel like I'm brushing over lots of details about the actual work itself so let me know if you need me to elaborate.

OLIVA: No this is perfect. And its raising so many more questions for me in the best way and maiing me so curious. I was wondering if we could circle back to when you mentioned place thought and I just want to know more about that. When we first started talking you mentioned system design and so manuy structural issues in the ways that our systems work. And I was just wondering how has your thinking around that evolved even in collegege, with the classes that you've mentioned or being in such a different world away from home and place. Being in a very systematic place where you can see systems from the inside?

WIKI: and especially given the institutions we are both a part of.

OLIVA: Yeah. So I was wondering how has seeing that through new eyes and then learning about place thought, what is that like for you? What has that been like?

WIKI: Yeah its really interesting because I have a very different world view and lived experiences as does any other person. For me, I mostly grew up in the united states in Northern californai and even if I wasn't on the reservation, I was very close in Del Norte county. I did live in New Zealand for a little bit and I moved to Ashland, Oregon my junior year of highschool. I also haver family in a lot of different places both internationally and in the states. Overall, I lived in very different countries and communities but when I think about my home I always come back to the idea of the Yurok Reservation and Aotearoa. No matter where I am, my home is those commkunities where my tribes are actually from. Growing up, I didn't have the language to both understand and articulate what I was experiencing or what my community was experiencing, but I saw it firsthand. For example, as a second grader, I lived on the reservation in Klamath. The closest grocery store is 20 miles away which is a 45 minute dfrive to

Crescent City. That's also wehre my school way, where my moms work was, that's where the town in. the road to Cresecent city is literally falling off of a cliff because of poor infrasturcutre and the fact that it was built on redwood and wood rots. So I would wake up and id get my to-go breakfast. You never knew how long the construction line would be, because theres multiple stops along that road. So every day I would hope that I was getting to school on time. And then at night my parents worked really late and it got really dark but we would have to go grocery shopping at night beuycase that was the only place to do so was 45 minutes away from where we lived. I was very lucky beucase I never had to worry about my paretns not having a car, I never had to worry about there not being gas in the car like my neighbors did, and I never had to worry abot if there was food on my table like my neighbors who often could only afford or have access to the Chesters Chicken which infamously gives everyone food poisonging at the local gas station. That is one version of the world. So in that sense I was exposed to this thought that "hmmmmmh, this is a result of poor policy." Health is linked to accessibility of resouces, abd tgere were very clear lines that I could see about "Oh I see how this is injust, I see how this is unfair"

OLIVA: And I see if first hand, how "its my neighbors and its my drive to school"

WIKI: Yes. Or my cousins, or my grandma. And also all of my elders are diabetic because they lived off of 'commod food'. Commodities the U.S. government gave to natives with white sugar, white flour, butter, that is not meant for our bodies. And then because theres dams built on our rivers, our fish are being killed so we don't have access to our most dependent food source. So in that sense as a seven year old, you might not be able to edplain how that works, but you know of it and you see it and you live it. The more I grow, the more im learning how people artilucat that in different ways. And I think I was just surprised as a teenager when I trasfered to new school and moved to towns outside of my county, that people just did not understand the intersectionality of all of these issues and identieis in the same way that I did. So that's something in hgihschool started becoming more aware of. And now I'm at a crazy institution, Oh my god, so I go to school at Yale. So the most colonial, big money, and in a lot of ways corrupt institution. But also very wealthy, powerful, and influential and also I am also very grateful to be there beuase I have an abundance of resources. Im also really grateful because all of my classes are fantastic, the fact that I can take a black and indigenous ecologies course where we're learning about the most abstract things that I don't think I could find in any other place. So in a lot of ways it's a weird situation to be in this institution that has this huge endowmebnt that's funding the manufacturing of weapons for wars and profiting off of that, one that's actively funding fossil fuels, one that's actively uplifting billionares. That's a werid space to being, knowing that its something im a part of. And I'm also taking advantage of the opportinut and using the resources and im joining student groups and organizations that work

to hold our school accountable and advocate for change. And also spaces like my black and indigenous ecologies class which are funded in order to grow idigneous thought and think about abstract indigenous futurism. So it's a very interesting weird world to be in and having some people who would maybe faint if they took one step on my reservation, think that New Haven is the most unsafe place they've ever been in. and im just hinking "What. We are in the Yale bubble guys, we are fine." So again just very different realities and its very fun to explore that. Sorry that was very big a lot of things.

OLIVA: No that was great and its just so interesting to hear about all those dichotomies and things existing at the same time. I mean Duke is very similar in a lot of ways, very colonial, has a lot of money invested in places that are exactly the opposite of the branding that the university is trying to promote. Duke has this climate commitment and doctrine that "We are the sustainability school and were going to solve climate change" but are on the side investing in fossil fuels. So to see that makes me think a lot. Okay this is our tea break, Im gonna get some water.

WIKI: What kind of tea are you drinking?

OLIVA: I need to make some tea! I've been loving the Vanilla Rooiboos tea right now.

WIKI: Ooh Yum. Im drinking some sort of immune support situation that I found in my pantry and am stealing some tea packets from home while im here.

OLIVA: Okay, this is so good for me, talking to you has given me so many things to think about. OH! Ive been wanting to ask you this for a while. I remember maybe a year ago, I mentioned something about salmon and I just remember this phrase its stuck with me for awhile, you said "I am salmon, my people are salmon." And I think about that a lot, and I was just wondering if you could talk about that. I am personally super curous about that.

WIKI: Yeah! I guess that is the same as place thought. I also would reccommebnd theres this Mojae Poet named natalie diaz and she has this poem called 'the first body is water'. And she essentially says that same thing which is "I am the river, the river is me." And then she elaborates on how that is not a metaphor for her. And she brings up a lot of good questions about body and memory and then she ties it back to bigger political issues in the US, in a way that I think is more tangible to think about or easier to apply to things that are happening. It's so up in the clouds sometimes, this terminology, and she centers it a little bit at the end. But yeah, that's really funny because I think it is the same thing. In Yurok, the word for salmon is ney-puy. It also is the word for food.

30:54
So food and salmon are interchangeable. But also where I come from, the village of Rekwoi is right on the mouth of the river. So even though we're the most north, we're downriver people, which is funny. And we have a rock and her name's Oregas and she's sort of a spirit rock, but she protects the salmon runs on the river.
31:22
And that's directly where my grandma's and my great grandma's houses are. Where our ancestral redwood plank house was since the time of memorial. And so Oregas is a really big part of my family. And she's not a God or a spirit that you pray to or worship.
31:51
Its more this is the place where salmon spawn and also a very significant place. Because it's where the river meets the ocean. Whoa, salmon do not spawn there. Let me be clear. But that's their final destination as they go into the estuary. And then it meets into the ocean. So that's the best spot to fish. But it's also its very important to consider how much you're fishing because otherwise you're harming the species. So when I say 'I am salmon' or 'I am river', it's not like there's no separation between us in the same way.
32:45
I need Salmon to survive just as much as the Salmon need me to survive in this moment. And we're living together and we have this strong relationship and the relationship between me and Salmon extends past many generations and times and spaces and places. So it's more of a question of who am I without Salmon?
33:15
We're salmon people. And part of my and our role as Yurok people is to make sure that the river is in good conditions for the salmon. So yeah, it's just like, who am I without salmon? And I think if you can honestly say that and mean it in every single part of your bone, spirit, body, being, it's like, well, then I am salmon. Yeah. There's no salmon without me. There's no river without me. Or maybe the inverse as well. I can't exist without salmon. I can't exist without river. And having both be true. No matter which way you flip it, its true.

OLIVA: Yeah. Thank you for sharing that. It's cool for me to hear that, and come back to it a while later and hear that. I'm curious, going back to talking about being in these big international spaces, like COP and these conferences, how did you bring home with you or I guess how did you bring home with you or bring those ideas, actually not ideas, ways of life or ways of thinking into those spaces? And did you feel listened to or no? Could you talk about that?
34:43
WIKI: Yeah, I mean, I think COP26 is the most extreme it ever gets, right? That's the UN's largest climate change conference. It's usually at the end of the year, after all of the other negotiations,

right, so this is the culmination of any and all reports, essentially to see ‘what did we learn?’ ‘What did we do?’ And every possible human being you can imagine is there. So there was one day where I walked down the hall and I saw AOC, I saw former UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and then I saw my auntie's brother from the Hoopa Reservation, wearing his beanie that one of our cousins crocheted. And I was just thinking, ‘okay, this is where we are.’ ‘This is today.’ In Scotland, by the way.

OLIVA: Okay.

WIKI: So it was just like, okay, very strange. This is like the most polarizing example, but to be really candid, it was weird and it was hard and it was very performative in many different ways. I was just an observer. I was 16. So basically as an activist, I didn't really have any power. But here's a lot of different ways to be involved and different spaces. They call them zones for example the blue zone or green zone that you have access to.
36:26
And I was immensely privileged and had a Blue Zone badge, which was where actual negotiations took place. So I couldn't go into the rooms because I had no reason to be talking to foreign diplomats about the Paris Agreement, but I could at least walk around and go to the pavilions and go to different panels, watch different panels and things like that.
36:55
I think the funniest story, it's not funny at all, it's actually quite sad. But the silliest story that I can think of is when we came in, and I came in, I was with a black and indigenous youth delegation.
37:21
And then there was also another huge indigenous delegation from mostly Ecuador, but also all over South America that we worked very closely with. And there were lots of elders who wore regalia. Those were people who literally live iin the Amazon forest, and they were very much wearing what they would wear every day. When we went through security at the airport, we all got through, but the way that their things were handled was just like very disrespectful and hard and weird.
37:49
Like UN Agents shaking their drums. I don't know, it was just very strange. Yeah, and insensitive. And then when you walk by, there's people taking photos as though you're monkeys in a petting zoo, basically. And then there was one moment where we... I mean, was this allowed? Maybe not, but we were burning root. So smudging in an outdoor/indoor space.
38:19

And actually, our lighters went through security. And this isn't just one airport security. This is five layers of gates and fences and armed forces and the military and there's people everywhere.

OLIVA: At COP?

WIKI: Yeah. Like there's-

OLIVA: So like military, like, wow.

WIKI: Yeah.

OLIVA: Okay, I had no idea.
38:49
WIKI: Yeah. All of their streets are blocked off for ages and you walk to these outdoor gates and then you walk further There's another outdoor gate and then once you get into the building, there's a long line where you check into security. Then there's another line just to show your passport. So this is all to say that here's multiple stages so if you weren't supposed to bring something in, you could have been stopped at any of those like points.
39:19
So we had a lighter we lit the the sweet grass and the root. The whole point though is not to have a fire. Like you actually don't want flames, you just want smoke because the idea is that the smoke carries your prayers and your intentions and it also cleanses you. And so we were doing that, this was day five or something and we had been doing this throughout the conference. So that's why I think we assumed it was okay.
39:49
We did that and one woman security officer saw. She saw that and was like, ‘that's fine.’ And we're like, ‘okay.’ Then another male came up to us and was like, ‘You need to stop, you're going to cause a fire. We're going to have to evacuate the whole building. You need to stop.’ And it became a really huge deal where all of these security officers were debating ‘Do we let them do this? Do we not?’
40:19
While simultaneously we’re smudging. It was a mix of different indigenous people all under the age of 30, around 10 of us, and we were in a circle smudging. There was one person trying to mediate, there were people yelling at us, it was a lot. But we felt that was important to do anyways.
40:49

Fast forward, basically the UN's head security guy was tailing us the entire conference and he said that we'd be banned from UN spaces if we ever did that again, that we were a risk, and that if we did it again like they would have to evacuate the whole conference which was like 10,000 people.
41:19
And then, on a really cute performative 'we love indigenous people' 'we love activists' 'we love people who care about the land' note, we were asked to speak and to close out the people's pavilion. So basically give a closing speech on behalf of all normal people, journalists, activists. Yeah, on the condition that we didn't bring any medicine with us. Medicine being like a piece of sweet, like a braid of sweet grass.
41:47
And Messiah was like, no, we're bringing a braid of soup grass on stage. Yeah. And again the head security guy kept being like, 'no, you can't do it. You can't do it. You can't go on stage.' And we're like, 'we're going to do it anyways.' And we did. And then we walked out burning the sweetgrass. We walked out like in a protest, smudging and singing our songs and drumming, and that was like a really powerful moment.
42:15
So I think that is an interesting example of how we did break the rules, but more importantly an example of how that resistance was met in a very big way. But then also there were microaggressions all over the place, right? You're meeting people from very different experiences, different cultural values, different worldviews.
42:44
We were on the train ride home and some like 40 year old man British man, said "Oh, you just want to go back to berry picking hunter gatherer days? Like, is that why you care about the land?" And I was just astonished. And his role was literally to be a diplomat, to advocate for the countries. He represented all of these island nations who are the most at threat from sinking under the water.

OLIVA: He's the rep?

WIKI: Yeah, a representative, and his role is to talk about like the future of their economies and how to prevent this from happening. And he told me to my face, a 16 year old girl on a train outside of the COP space, "Oh you're naive you just want to go back to hunter-gatherer days."
43:31
And I was just taken aback, like, wow. So yeah, that's that. But in a lot of other ways, I'm not engaging with those people. Most of the people I'm with are down for the same cause, understand, or are open to listening. Yeah, I mean, I made a whole podcast episode about it with the Laura Flanders show, in case anybody would like to listen.

44:01
OLIVA: Okay. That will go on the transcript as a must listen after this.

WIKI: Yes, thank you. It gives the most concise version of that because my brain could not articulate everything right now.

OLIVA: Totally understand.

WIKI: Also that was exactly two years ago today.

OLIVA: Wow. That podcast or COP?

WIKI: COP26

OLIVA:Wow.

WIKI: Yeah.

OLIVA: Wow. I had no idea about all of that. Yeah. And I'm sad to say that I'm not shocked. Which is really sad. This is just really sad and depressing actually to me. Yeah.
44:51
WIKI: I think the interesting part of it too is how so much of it is generational. It shocked me because it was such a stereotype. I was like, why is this so stereotypical? Like, is this not embarrassing for you?

OLIVA: Yeah.

WIKI: For all of these like older people who criticized us for thinking that we could improve the condition of our planet or lower carbon emissions, just that simple idea. And I realized that maybe older generations really don't understand youth visions. Because I feel like all of my peers, I mean I can't say all of my peers and really mean that, but I feel that most people I talk to at least know that the climate crisis is real and can tell you the ways in which they've experienced it.

OLIVA: Well, especially the fact that the person who's supposed to be representing the ideas and the change is then saying just super ignorant, horrible things. That's the people that we have in charge right now? That's who we're having represent us, I don't know, that just raises so many issues.

46:20
WIKI: Oh wait, sorry, I forgot to tell you the funny thing. Okay, so then at COP 27, as a reaction to that, they made a smudging room, which was literally a cardboard box. A three foot, three by three foot room in the space where you could smudge. And the actual Indigenous caucus, the UN's official Indigenous caucus, met the next day to talk about our unplanned action and was mad that we did that. Which is also like...what? We work together. These are the leaders of nonprofits that I've worked for that have funded our work. These are people who know my auntie. I think this is another part of the family aspect, its so fun and rewarding, but also there's a lot of political conflict even between your own people and your own groups. And that can be a hard thing to balance.
47:20
OLIVA: Yeah. Well, and also being like, I love these people. They're my family. They're my aunties. But it adds a whole other layer.

WIKI: Yeah. So it's just like a lot.

OLIVA: Yeah.

WIKI: Sorry, I don't know if you have to go in three minutes or you have a timeframe.

OLIVA: I don't. Do you have to go?

WIKI: No, no, no, I'm all good.
47:50
OLIVA: Okay, I have two kind of questions and I want to see if there's one of these that you would want to talk about more. First of all, one question would be what organizing work for the future would you be interested in? Or what keeps you hopeful or what's driving you forward to do things in the future, I guess.

WIKI: Yeah, those are both really good questions. I have similar answers for both of those. Since middle school, honestly, I've always been involved in something organizer-y. I think I always sort of am. Freshman year of high school, I worked a lot with this indigenous girls group. I did a lot around the elections sophomore year of high school. And I also did a lot of journalism in high school around interviewing elders and learning about the community I come from and the historical organizing movements from there. Senior year of high school, I was really involved in a transition off fossil fuels campaign. I've always been been engaged in something. And that hasn't been intentional like, ‘oh, I'm always going to do something.’ Its more that there's always something that I care about. There's always something that's going to be impacted. Therefore,

there's always going be a way in which I can serve my community or learn more about it. And so in this first transition into college, I really took a step back and said, ‘no, I'm just living life and taking it slower.’ Around two months ago, I was feeling really restless, especially just being on my computer or iPad, reading and doing assignments and I felt really disengaged. And I was just thinking, ‘what is happening?’ And asking myself ‘what is making me feel this way?’ And I realized, ‘oh, I feel inactive.’

50:38

I feel like I'm not learning enough, especially moving to this new place for college. I feel that there's so many times where I'm walking down the street and I don't know where I am or where I am in relation to my dorm or the dining hall. And I need to know about where I am. This is important to me. So the thing motivating me right now is figuring that out. Where I am on the East Coast, not just New Haven, but also what is the community I'm coming into? And my orientation group was very good about it, that was the intention of the orientation group I participated in. So I've definitely been learning about that. But there's also a lot about unions right now and the institution that I'm a part of, like there's lots of ways to engage. When it comes to anything, there's lots of ways to engage with activists, activists organizing or ways in which I need to keep them accountable or learn about the things. Specifically that this institution that I'm a part of of has misaligned values with me. I need to learn more about that. And so I've joined a few more student organizations that have helped me learn a lot. I feel like listening is my biggest role right now. Taking it in and figuring out, getting a map, where am I in the world physically? What are the physical things going on? The housing crisis in my community, the very blatant racism and the classist divide between this really wealthy institution and the community. But then also what does it mean to hold this privilege and be a part of this place that is fueling the things that I'm actively working against and don't believe in? The people who are doing that on my campus are inspiring me right now.

52:56

I've seen a lot of work being done in different ways. So yeah, I think that's motivating me. Honestly, it's just the people doing the work inspire me. I open up Instagram and I'll see somebody sharing this event to learn about policing in our community, that happened last week. And I just thought, oh, awesome! And then I showed up and then I saw all of these people who are into documentary filmmaking and using creative creative outlets to amplify the voices of those most impacted by the gentrification in our community. And I just thought, okay, great, now you’ve already inspired me.

OLIVA: And now those circles are connected.

53:54

WIKI: Yeah, exactly. I'm also in classes that I'm really excited about. We just had to sign up for classes and next semester I'm taking one called Archive Aesthetics and Community Storytelling.

It's basically a creative work and it sounds similar to this course that youre interviewing me for. I think that'll be fun. And then also my elders have always inspired me. And that's really where I learned the most in terms of who I am and knowing about where I come from. Because that's the most grounding when you go away and remind yourself why you do the things you do. And also when I say like restless, I don't mean like in that capitalist sort of nine to five grind. I mean like there was so much happening around me, especially this climate conference happening. So I saw a lot of messaging around that and a lot more push to understand the way that Yale is funding military things right now. And so when I felt restless I was thought, oh, I have to learn about this because it's right in front of me. And then my elders remind me, this is who I am. Just existing, I guess, is being an activist. And also they're getting older, and I think it's important to have those stories. So while I'm here, I definitely want to want to be listening to them more. I always record my grandma talking, my auntie's talking. So just lots of that, which is very sweet and honestly maybe the most fulfilling way to learn. Yeah.

OLIVA: I love that idea. You've touched on this a couple of times and I just want to say it or, or I don't know if there's even a question behind this, but I love the way that you've talked about and just mentioned the idea, or not idea, I guess idea is not the right word.

WIKI: I know I always use idea, but it's different I know.
56:38
OLIVA: It's more concrete. It's not an idea. Like it's here, it's real. Just creativity and documenting and journalism. Yeah, just those are so important. And you've mentioned that a couple of times, and I just I love I love hearing about that and tt's just so important, I think. Important doesn't even feel like the right word either, more like integral or like...

WIKI: Right?

OLIVA: It's not just important, it's central. It's key. Yeah, I don't know if you have any more thoughts on that. I've just been thinking about it, and it's really cool to hear about that.

WIKI: I've been thinking about it a lot because even outside of the, this interview, I don't know if we've ever talked about storytelling or documentary?

OLIVA: I don't think so. And I didn't really know about all this and it's really exciting.

WIKI: Well, and there's so much more that I think we could get into. Yeah, it's interesting because that's actually been a really…there's no English words for it. This is annoying. There are no English words to talk about the significance of that. Even if I didn't consider myself creative,

my parents always fostered that sort of interest and curiosity in me and for me, which I'm very grateful for. But I think one of the biggest reasons why I mention this, is because so much has been miscommunicated and mistranslated, or just not told or not remembered or honored in the way that I think it should be honored when it comes to stories of the people most impacted by the climate crisis, and also the cultures and communities whose livelihood has been put at the expense of settler colonial goals and the climate crisis, including indigenous peoples. I always come back to that. And the communities I come from, because that's honestly that's the only thing I can really speak to because it's my community. I think also one big difference, or one interesting thing about having double indigenous communities from two different hemispheres, is seeing the parallels, between colonial histories, but also the differences and how key storytelling has been in both of them, in both impacting narratives around them, narratives within them, and even just language. My dad's dad didn't know English until he was 10, which is crazy because everybody speaks English first.
59:29
A lot of people are bilingual and speak Te Reo Māori[4], but it's never their first language. But it's my grandpa's first language, and he's very well known for his translating abilities. My dad can speak it. And throughout New Zealand, the government and this education system has integrated that as part of a normal thing, in the way that we learned Spanish in schools or we know basic vocabulary on the West Coast is very much the same. In Yurok country though, there's are only three native speakers and even then it's how fluent are they? And we lost that. And no, actually, I don't wanna say that. I don't think we lost it. I just don't think it's remembered in the same way as it should be. And so narratives have always been important. And even just that one example of language, it has really emphasized that for me.
01:00:37
So I think a necessary part of activism work is narratives in storytelling. And I've had a really fun time exploring that in different ways. So I've made podcasts, I made podcasts with Truth to Power, which I didn't even talk about but it was a social justice organization at my high school. I did a series of archive interviews after my sophomore year of high school with an organization called Save California Salmon[5]. And that was fun.

OLIVA: You worked with them?!
WIKI: Yes.

OLIVA: Oh, my god!

[4] A language spoken by the Māori people, the indigenous peoples of mainland Aotearoa, New Zealand
[5] **Save California Salmon** is a non profit organization "dedicated to policy change and community advocacy for Northern California's salmon and fish dependent people."

WIKI: Do you want to work with them?
01:01:07
OLIVA: Yeah.

WIKI: I can connect you so easily. No, they're awesome.

OLIVA: Do you know Niria Alicia Garcia[6]?

WIKI: Um, I know the name.

OLIVA: OK, I've been researching her for this class and I've been on the Save California Salmon website for hours.

WIKI: Just let me just. OK. My computer case. I have a sticker right here.

OLIVA: You are kidding. Oh, my God. Wow. Sorry. I just that's amazing.
01:01:37
WIKI: Okay I think about this so much, and I think about you so much and how awesome all the things, oh, I'm sorry, this is not related to the interview.

OLIVA: Okay, me too, me too.
WIKI: Its awesome, all the things they're doing, but let's put a pin in this, because I've actually seen a lot of things where I've thought of you.

OLIVA: Okay, yeah, we'll come back to this. That's fantastic. Anyway, sorry, just a little brief intermission.

WIKI: Well, yeah, but through Save California Salmon, that's when I interviewed my great-grandma's brother Uncle Ray, the one who went to the Supreme Court case. Oh, now thinking about it, I did write a college essay on this. But it's one of my favorite things I think that I've ever done. I just went over to his house, I just walked over from his sister's house. He was in bed and I just recorded him. And then I had that story and I have that story and it's archived. And he passed away a month and a half after that. And I was just like, whoa, we need this. So I think in all the forms that art and storytelling take, I encourage everybody to think about it and use that. Oh, there's a train. That is, I don't think there's a more perfect way to sum that up.
01:03:06

[6] Niria Alicia Garcia is a Xicana environmental activist and human rights advocate who works with the non-profit Save California Salmon

OLIVA: I have so many thoughts about that and thank you so much for going there and being willing to tell me about this. With what you've said about the narratives, I mean, that's the reason that we're doing this archive, and the class has been a lot our assignments are to listen to this piece in the archives about youth justice in the Philippines on tsunamis.

WIKI: I mean seeing how oh I walked over to his house and I talked to him and then and now that's there and it's documented is so powerful. Thank you for creating this space and letting me ramble.
01:04:05
I don't know that I've said a grammatically correct sentence at all during this time, but again, I'm a firm believer and just record and whatever you get, you get, you know?

OLIVA: Yeah. And you've said many, many sentences of substance that I can't wait to go back through and get to listen to all of this again. Thank you so much.

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