

DOPE LABS

Transcript of Lab 018 ____

Titi: So Thanksgiving is next week.

Zakiya: Oh, boy.

Titi: Are you cooking?

Zakiya: No, I'm not.

Titi: What?

Zakiya: First time in a long time.

Titi: Right. I was about to say when was the last time you didn't cook for Thanksgiving? That's that's wild.

Zakiya: No turkey for me.

Titi: Mm hmm. No turkey in my house, period. Because none of us like it. Like we used to get turkey every year. And now we're just like naw we don't like turkey. Let's just say that that's not a part of what we eat. I eat Zakiya's turkey, to be clear, because she she does something different. Zakiya's turkey tastes like ham. And so I will eat that bird.

Zakiya: I know this is like the first Thanksgiving in forever that I'm not cooking, but I'm happy to say I will not be rattling pots and pans.

Titi: I never cook for Thanksgiving. If somebody acts me to make something, then I usually just do like mac and cheese and that's it.

Zakiya: I remember that boomerang from when you made that mac and cheese. Oh, man, it looks so good.

Titi: People like it. I don't really eat mac and cheese like that.

Zakiya: I know this goes against everything that we know. Everybody that's listening right now. You're not supposed to eat the mac and cheese if somebody says don't eat mac and cheese like that and they made it. It's actually very good.

Titi: Yes. Because I have everybody taste test and I'm like, be honest. And it's my sisters. So they're always gonna be honest.

Titi: I'm Titi.

Zakiya: And I'm Zakiya.

Titi: And from Spotify studios, this is Dope Labs.

Zakiya: Everybody knows we love food, it's no secret. We've talked about it so much. But I think there's always so many of these complicated relationships with some of them are around culture. Some of them are around like sourcing of food.

Titi: Right.

Zakiya: And Thanksgiving is just one of those food based holidays. I'm like, I don't know about this. I know probably since maybe the fourth grade, I've been standing up and talking about the pilgrims wiping out the Native Americans every year at Thanksgiving

Titi: Yes. So Thanksgiving has a sordid past. And people are becoming less enchanted with the idea of Thanksgiving because of what it's rooted in, what it's based on and its history.

Zakiya: Yes. It's not like that Peanuts cartoon that they show. No,.

Titi: No. And it ain't construction paper feathers and turkey sandwiches.

Zakiya: Draw your hand and turn it into a turkey.

Titi: It ain't none of that.

Zakiya: It's none of that. Gather around the cornucopia.

Titi: No. No cornucopia. OK. Everybody's just starting to feel like naw im not with it. The only Christopher we acknowledge is Wallace.

Zakiya: That's right. Baby baby *biggie voice*

Zakiya: So in this episode, we're basically rolling these all of these kind of feelings and truths.

Yes.

Zakiya: Into one big ball of dough. That's how you can kind of put it.

Titi: What you making with that dough? A Pie?

Zakiya: Truth pie,.

Titi: Truth pie! I hope it's sweet.

Zakiya: We are talking about.

Both: Colonialism.

Zakiya: Specifically, we're looking at colonialism through the lens of ecology. So if you don't know what those words mean. Hang tight. We're moving straight to the recitation. So we say we're talking about colonialism through the lens of ecology.

Titi: Colonialism is a human process that has to do with unequal power structures. One society interfering with another society's ability to thrive. There are a bunch of different types of colonialism. But what we're going to focus on in this episode is called settler colonialism. Settler colonialism implies a group of people moving into another group of people's territory and claiming it as their own. And in order to do that, they're willing to eliminate that other group of people physically, culturally and everything else.

Zakiya: And the lens through which we're going to explore colonialism is ecology. If you remember from our cuffing season episode, ecology is a branch of biology that deals with the relationship of one organism to another and those organisms to their physical surroundings.

Titi: I think it's important for us to kind of unpack some of this stuff and talk about some of the broader ramifications of colonialism. Like we're becoming more and more aware of the effects that it had on the Native American population. But there are other things that were affected, too, right?

Zakiya: We know there are lots of plants and animals that are extinct that exist no more.

Titi: Right. There are fruits and veggies that are not indigenous to North America, that are here, that are here, that we eat daily, that are in our supermarkets, that we that are now grown in the United States. But I have a lot of questions about all of this because I feel like I only like see like a little little corner of it is like not even like the tip of the iceberg. I don't even feel like I see the full tip of the iceberg. I feel like I can only see it like a snowflake. And so I really just want an avalanche of information. About all of this, the effects on flora and fauna, the effects on the indigenous people of North America, the effects on animals and everything.

Zakiya: That's ambitious. No, it's good, right? Because I think what it says is that you understand that there are effects right there. Often people think like, oh, it's just, you know, these groups. And then, you know, my cousin is part Cherokee and it's like . No, no, no. You don't understand.

Titi: Right.

Zakiya: All of these groups that were basically eradicated, you know. So we've got these big questions. But what do we really want to get to the bottom of? What are we pressing out here?

Titi: One of the things is what was the ecology of North America before European colonialism? Yeah. And how did the indigenous communities interact with their environment before then?

Zakiya: Yeah. There's probably a lot we can learn. And then I guess the next question that follows that is how was the ecology affected after colonialism started? So. Now these people are here was like is in a rapid decline. Is it gradual, like what's happening?

Titi: And I think the last question that I have is what do we do going forward with all the information that we're about to get? What are the steps that we can take as citizens of America, citizens of this world,.

Zakiya: Citizen scientists.

Titi: As global citizens, as I like to say, to make things better and to improve the environment?

Zakiya: Yeah, because I think we're definitely at a point now where we're back in the stage of conservation trying to undo. Right. All of this stuff that's been done in the past couple hundred years.

Titi: And you can't know where you're going unless you know where you came from.

Zakiya: Aye

Titi: Let's get into the dissection. And to help us out we called on Dr. Nicholas Reo.

Dr. Reo: I'm a citizen of the Sioux St. Mary Tribe of Chippewa Indians, which is a tribal nation located in northern Michigan. What's now known as northern Michigan. And I'm an associate professor of Native American Studies and environmental studies at Dartmouth College.

Zakiya: Dr. Reo studies, Indigenous Knowledge and Ecological Stewardship on indigenous lands. Another area of his focus is broadening discussions on climate change and invasive species by including indigenous lives and indigenous perspectives.

Titi: What is invasive species?

Zakiya: Invasive species are organisms that are non-native to an area. And so often because they're not native, they're able to take over an area and eliminate other native plants. Or if the native plant is wiped out and an invasive species, a non-native plant is brought in, Then they kind of like claim that area.

Titi: OK,.

Zakiya: Settler colonialism on a plant scale, plant and animal scale.

Titi: Dr Reo is the perfect guest for this episode because when we talk about European colonialism, it's always through the lens of the Europeans.

Zakiya: Yep,.

Titi: Like they were these great people that they were going out and building these ships and sailing across all the seven seas and doing this really great work. But there were other people on these lands that were already there living and thriving before they got there.

Zakiya: And in this episode, we really want to talk about the land in the context of the indigenous experience, knowledge and rich history.

Titi: So let's start by talking about the northeast region of what is now known as the United States, way before European colonialism.

Dr. Reo: So the northeast is a huge region. Prior to European contact, you had a lot of people. It was, first of all, very much a peopled landscape. We tend to underestimate not only the presence of indigenous people, but the influence of indigenous people on the landscape.

Zakiya: So not only was the land highly populated by diverse indigenous communities, it was also very developed, but not in a way that was familiar to Europeans.

Dr. Reo: When Europeans first laid eyes on, you know, the various parts of the northeast. They misinterpreted those spaces as being, you know, natural, quote unquote, as being wilderness and defining that as a place that is sort of, you know, kind of got the natural ecology going on. And that doesn't involve human interference or inputs.

Titi: Just because they didn't recognize a neat little English garden didn't mean that the land hadn't been cultivated for a long period of time. Indigenous tribes in the north east were producing food and medicine within the landscape through really dynamic, committed relationships with different plants, animals and ecosystems.

Zakiya: I feel like there's a lot we can learn from what the relationship is between self and environment, right from some of these indigenous groups because you have to think if they were making medicine and doing all this stuff. But when you show that through European eyes, you felt like the land was uninhabited, right? That speaks volumes in my mind. Right, about not disturbing nature. And there are some there have to be some clues. We can learn there about conservation and to help us understand this relationship. Dr. Reo told us about the important connection between the Anishinaabeg people, One of the indigenous groups in the Great Lakes region of North America, and their important relationship to wild rice or what is called in the national language mahnomen.

Dr. Reo: It's a very culturally significant plant and being to the Anishinaabeg people, it's really a core part of our cultural identity. It's a core part of how we understand where we fit in the world and it has incredible nutritional value too. And so it's an important part of our foodways. We don't just treat it like it. We're a relative. It's like literally a part of our kin.

Titi: It's just like the respect that you have for your friends or your family. Like respecting them doesn't mean, you know, not checking in on them, not giving them the the resources they need to survive. Not talking to them and making sure that they're OK. Like they approach it the exact same way, like it's their family. And the Anishinaabeg approach, the care and harvesting of this wild rice is with the same kind of respect.

Dr. Reo: The specific ways that we knock rice into our boats, it allows for the plants to produce more seed and for a lot more of that seed to actually germinate at the bottom of the lakebed than if you were to not touch it at all.

Zakiya: I mean, I think that's really interesting, because when we think about respect, sometimes you think that means like leave it alone, don't touch it. But in this case, they're saying we are doing specific actions to stimulate growth. Right. To encourage seeds to drop down into this fertile soil and to grow more plant.

Dr. Reo: I think that there is a lot of examples like that where it's definitely it's sort of an indigenous perspective about reciprocal relationships between humans and plants and humans and animals. Indigenous perspectives more often hold that our dynamic engagement with those plants and animals helps them to thrive in various ways.

Zakiya: So that's a great point. What about the animals for the Anishinaabeg, there is also great importance on the interaction between humans and animals. There is a relationship there that requires attention and care. Dr. Reo gave us a great example.

Dr. Reo: So for Anishinaabeg folks some of our oldest teachings about our connections to other beings on this planet tell us that we are on a parallel path with wolves who we refer to as ma'iingen, and that whatever happens to ma'iingen will happen to the Anishinaabeg. Both ma'iingen and Anishinaabeg rely heavily on waawaashkeshi or the deer as a really important part of our foodways. If the deer population is suffering, then we'll see ma'iingen and Anishinaabeg, both population suffering. And so we're integrally tied together and our fates are interwoven. And recognizing that connection makes Anishinaabeg folks very committed to the well-being of both wolves and deer.

Zakiya: I think that's a great illustration or example of like how we're all tied together. People say it but like this. Is that in practice?

Titi: Absolutely. Like there's no distinction between us and trees and leaves and the grass and the seeds. We're all a part of this world ecosystem.

Zakiya: Yeah. So we learned that for centuries before European colonialism started, North America was a densely populated and diverse region where indigenous peoples thrived by

cultivating sophisticated, intimate relationships with plants, animals and the rest of the ecosystem around them. But what happened when the Europeans got there? How were those balances affected? We'll get into those questions right after the break.

Titi: We're back. And as Dr. Reo explained before, European colonialism, indigenous communities in North America had for centuries been thriving off the land through their highly evolved and complex cultural practices, specifically their relationship with the environment around them.

Zakiya: What we know is that these practices were severely disrupted when the Europeans arrived. So basically when Europeans arrived, they're like, I don't recognize any of this. This needs to be tamed. This needs to be put into, you know, my category of gardening..

Titi: I don't know these animals where where are the animals that we're used to.

Zakiya: For them, everything was discovery that was waiting to be influenced.

Titi: The major effect of European colonialism is the genocide of indigenous people, period. But there are other things that were also affected that Dr. Reo helped us dove into more.

Zakiya: He told us about major changes in four main areas diseases, invasive species, deforestation and global biotic exchange.

Dr. Reo: Some of the sort of categorical changes that we have seen come from the introduction of diseases.

Zakiya: My friend was not lying when she said the pilgrims.

Titi: That's right! Tuberculosis, smallpox, the flu. These were all brought from Europe and contributed to the depopulation of North America.

Dr. Reo: These diseases that were brought from Europe to North America, they were very influential in the severe reduction in human population of the continent. Prior to the big waves of colonization, you know, the change over from primarily, you know, from an indigenous human population to relatively short order, a predominantly euro-American settler euro-Canadian settler population, you know, a great deal that had to do with the introduction of diseases.

Zakiya: This is interesting that, you know, the severe reduction in human population of the continent prior to the big wavess of colonisation. So this is not just violence with a sort. Right, like biological warfare for real!

Titi: The next area that was greatly affected with invasive species.

Dr. Reo: The introduction of European agricultural systems came with a lot of associated pest species. So Europeans brought some species on purpose that had deleterious impacts on the North American landscape. And then they brought in some as hitchhikers.

Zakiya: And it's so interesting because, you know, the question is, was it intentional? Was it unintentional? But we know, you know, the Spanish. Right. They really pride themselves on being explorers. And I think I was reading somewhere that. The Spanish crown used to require all of their exploratory ships right, to carry seeds and plants and livestock. When they went on expeditions. Right. This is so they could establish European forms of agricultural production. Can you imagine? You're like I'm going somewhere. I don't know anything about it, but I'm taking my cow. Taking my pig. A couple of these seeds and this like you don't know what those effects are.

Titi: Right. It's just like if we live on the East Coast. If we were to move to Arizona, which is a lot of desert and things like that, and we say, well, I don't want to live in the desert. I want to live in what I'm used to. I want to have a lawn. I want to have I don't want to have, you know, these types of trees. I don't want palm trees. I want like a regular maple tree. And we go there and we dig up the earth and we put down soil, that is that a maple tree can live in and we change the ecosystem around us to fit what we want that is existing on the East Coast and that begins to by default, change everything around.

Zakiya: It is like the butterfly effect.

Titi: Yeah.

Zakiya: You know that movie?

Titi: Yes. With Ashton Kutcher? Yes.

Zakiya: It's like the butterfly effect. Except you don't get to go back and do it over.

Titi: Exactly. And preserving these natural parts of different environments is super important to the overall health of the ecosystem.

Dr. Reo: And it's not only plants, but also animals. And one of the more notable ones is hogs. So bringing in pigs and letting them sort of run free, they naturalized and had major impacts on forests of New England and other other regions.

Zakiya: That's wild to me.

Titi: There were no hogs here.

Zakiya: That's the major industry in North Carolina.

Titi: When we think about America and how Americans eat, pork is a major part of that. And I've never considered that they weren't indigenous to North America, but they've not only contributed to our diet. They ate up a lot of the forests.

Zakiya: Yes. You know, I see this in the movies all the time and they say, like how pigs and horses can totally, like, rip up roots and everything with their snouts and clear whole fields of like trees and grasses and native grasses. But also, I see people use pigs. They say they will eat anything. Like they will eat humans. They will eat. Did you know that?

Titi: No.

Zakiya: Yes.

Titi: So that leads us into the next topic that was really affected by colonialism. Deforestation.

Dr. Reo: So European settlers cut down forests in ways that had never really been. It's not that it's not that indigenous peoples didn't cut trees. Certainly they did. But the scale of timber harvest is at a completely different level by European settlers.

Titi: One thing that the Europeans were doing was cutting down a lot of trees. Yes. In order to have like.

Zakiya: Rolling hills!, like they had in Europe.

Titi: Exactly to more so mimic what they had in Europe and then also to build stuff. And when they're shipping things to other countries, they want to put it into a box of the cut down a tree to build a box for that. And things like that. But another thing that came along with that is that they also were bringing over trees.

Zakiya: Yes.

Titi: That are native to Europe.

Zakiya: Right.

Titi: Because they wanted to, again, mimic the European landscape. And these trees, when they were bring them over, they would bring them over the whole tree and the roots.

Zakiya: And the root ball and everything.

Titi: And so when you're bringing the roots along, you have to bring the dirt and soil that it was in.

Zakiya: Yeah.

Titi: And when they did that, unintentionally or intentionally, we're not really sure. But they also brought over earthworms. The earthworm is not something that is native to the United States. And so they would come over with a tree that were planted in the ground. And these earthworms, they they spread like wildfire. We see earthworms from sea to shining sea. OK. Like they are everywhere. And what we, we don't know, because when we think about earthworms, we like,

oh, they're so good for our ecosystem and things like that. But earthworms also have contributed a lot to deforestation. I'm looking at this picture from a paper that somebody wrote that shows two pictures, a picture of a forest with no earthworms.

Zakiya: Right.

Titi: And a forest that has earthworms. And there is a clear difference. There's still trees. It looks like a forest that we would walk through. It has trees. It has little bushes and has, you know, logs and everything like that. But the forest is impacted by earthworm consumption of leaf detritus and leaf detritus.. Zakiya you can explain it way better than me.

Zakiya: Yeah. It's just like falling leaf waste or debris. But that also is like fertilizer. Right. That is that is. Then those nutrients from those dead leaves are then reconsumed by that soil. They add that you fall from the tree cover down to the ground. You, provide nutrients for that soil.

Titi: So the earthworms are eaten, all that stuff up.

Zakiya: Yeah.

Titi: Which completely changes the look and feel of the forest.

Zakiya: And the last of these categories is global biotic exchange. So. This is the movement of products, food, agricultural products Across the globe, basically.

Dr. Reo: Especially as we as we see the movement of not just people but sort of products and goods, when we see global trade pick up and there's the movement of products, food, agricultural products, but also things that are made of wood or that require the packaging of wood and pallets and things like that. But just the movement of goods across continents through shipping and sort of the globalization of our economic system, then we see a huge increase in biological introductions across continents and that's had a big impact.

Titi: I think an important point to make is that all of these categories that we're talking about do not exist in isolation. When you affect one, you affect all of them.

Zakiya: Right. And that's what makes the impact so large. Right.

Titi: So even something like deforestation and disease. So let's say that they bring over hogs that eat up all the plants and the trees and everything like that. But there's a specific plant that they used for medicine. And if that plant is no longer there and this disease shows up that they would normally use a plant as this plant, as a treatment in the plant isn't there, then you would have depopulation.

Zakiya: Yep. And then what is the effect of the deep population? Right. Because when we think about these intentional relationships with plants and animals, if you're wiping out these indigenous communities, who is the steward of this of this land now?

Titi: Right. Who's cultivating and who's who's building those relationships with plants, animals, trees and everything in between?

Zakiya: Yeah.

Dr. Reo: We have to think about the impacts of genocide. The deep population of the Americas, the severe reduction of indigenous populations had a huge impact on the things that we're talking about. And in the context of, you know, if what we saw, you know, you asked what what would the northeast have looked like prior to European contact? And I said, well, a lot of what you saw had to do with relationships between plants and animals and humans. When you take a lot of the humans out of that picture, it affects what's going on ecologically more broadly.

Zakiya: The other really interesting thing is that this is not just a historical issue like this is something that is that persists is still happening today in so many ways.

Titi: Yeah, on reservations where indigenous communities experience disproportionately high rates of unemployment, health issues and suicide.

Dr. Reo: And so when we talk about when when people, especially indigenous studies scholars, talk about settler colonialism, we don't talk about it as something that happened. We talk about something that's ongoing. So as long as there's a settler presence and as long as indigenous lives are being eliminated, as long as indigenous cultures are being ignored or eliminated, then settler colonialism is ongoing. It's a set of structures and not not a moment in time.

Titi: So like you were saying, these things are persistent. It's not something that's just in the past and we just look back on it and say, oh, man, that sucks. We're still currently dealing with all of these things. So my question is, is what can we do going forward to make our environment better, not just for our plants and animals, but for the indigenous population as a whole?

Dr. Reo: I think we have to figure out ways to make space for indigenous peoples. We need to be able to make space physically. You know, people need physical space for their for their political and cultural and economic endeavors. So that has to do with returning land. So we need to make that kind of space, make space politically so that the places that indigenous peoples do have some control, you know, reservations, other places, urban centers where indigenous peoples are living and have some control to create policy structures that allow them to have self-determination for their own futures, to determine their own future paths and to not interfere with a lot of court rulings and policies that interfere with their ways of interacting with the world and to make space ontologically to recognize the importance of indigenous ways, of understanding the world and ways of being in the world to to make space for that in our education system and a court of law and other places.

Titi: As people who want to be aware of, you know, all the ways that we are affecting our environment, ecology, I think this kind of shined a light in a very dark corner.

Zakiya: Yes. And I think there's a lot to be learned here. Right. Even in your outlook and approach. Sometimes these things can feel so overwhelming and you feel like, oh, well, there's

nothing I can do. But I think even some awareness, some space. And just thinking about taking this interconnected approach to everything that you do to conservation to changes you want to make. Right. It all matters.

Titi: Yeah. I mean, do a little bit of research on where your from your town, your state and find out about the indigenous people of that area and take that first initial step. And once you can find out what they were doing and the way that the landscape looked, then you can make deliberate efforts to improve our environment.

Zakiya: There are a lot of organizations that are pushing back to replanting some of our native seeds and plants. And so there's a lot of opportunity. You just have to go looking for it.

Titi: What I think I might do is do some research on the indigenous people of Maryland and my county. And find out the types of food they were eating. Maybe try and make something with those ingredients.

Zakiya: I hope they're still around for you to do.

Titi: Exactly. It might be tough, but I think it is worth a try.

Zakiya: Yeah, I'm in.

Titi: that's it for Lab 18. Don't forget to check out our Web site for a cheat sheet on today's episode. You can find it and sign up for our newsletter at dopelabspodcast.com.

Zakiya: Also, we love hearing from you. What did you think about today's lab? What are your ideas for future labs? Give us a call. Our number is 2 0 2 5 6 7 7 0 2 8. You can also find us on Twitter and Instagram @dopelabspodcast. Titi is on Twitter @dr_tsho.

Titi: And you can find Zakiya @zsaidso.

Zakiya: Follow us on Spotify or wherever you listen to podcasts. Special thanks to our guest, Dr. Nicholas REO. You can find out more about his work in our show notes. Our producer is Jenny Radelet Mast of Wave Runner Studios. Mixing in sound design by Hannis Brown and special. Thanks to Tyler Adams.

Titi: Original theme music is by Taka Yasuzawa and Alex Sugiura with additional music by Elijah LX Harvey.

Zakiya: Dope Labs is a production of Spotify Studios and MegaOhm Media Group and is executive produced by Titi Shodiya and Zakiya Whatley.

Titi: Cats are not native to the United States.

Zakiya: Yes, the bird people have been really telling me a lot about that because they're saying that ...well the bird people I follow on Twitter. Shout out to the Audubon Society.