

Australia episode

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SPEAKERS

Geskeva Komba, Chris, Sam Keast, Ez Eldin Deng, Natalie Kivell, Rama, Ruth Nyaruot Ruach, Roshani

Natalie Kivell 00:00

Welcome you all to the space, we've been talking about this episode for a long time, I'm so grateful to be talking across time zones with all of you in Australia, and today we are looking at our Australian episode was really focusing on this idea of accompanying or relationality, and community research or research as solidarity praxis. And what I want to do, because a lot of our listeners will have already heard Chris's voice many times as a host on some of the other episodes. And now he's pivoting to a guest. And actually, some of the rest of you Roshani, Sam, Rama will likely also be heard as kind of co-hosts on an episode with the graduate student collective. So just repositioning you in this idea of the work that you do in Australia, and that community engaged projects that you're doing that are really pushing the idea of what relational work looks like, and what accompaniment looks like, will ground this episodes, I want to hand it first to Chris and Rama, to introduce yourselves. But also to tell us you know, what is it that you're hoping to really uplift in this episode? And and how did we come to this particular focus in the kind of really nuanced and complex work that you're doing in Australia?

Rama 01:17

Chris, should I jump jump in, jump in first, I feel like, it sounds like you've gotten a lot of air time recently. So maybe you can give those vocal cords a bit of a rest. Hi folks, my name is Rama. I am a- I was a PhD student I just finished finished recently actually one of one of Chris's Chris's students in the area of community psychology. And so some of the folks that are on this podcast today. Some people that I worked with, during my PhD, that I connected in through with with Chris. And I'm also just thinking of the irony that we're talking about relationality. And I'm really conscious that I haven't spoken to folks for so long. And I really just want to catch up and have a chat and see how everyone's doing, we've got to talk about all of these other things. So I'm going to try try not to get off track and, and you know, keep asking people how, how they are. But I think I and correct me if I'm if I'm wrong, please. So I think you know, some of the ideas around this this episode, were the fact that we keep having these

conversations throughout the research that we're doing, which we'll talk a little bit about, and the work that Next in color who are guests here as well had been doing and we'd catch up for meetings and then end up having these fantastic chats. And then afterwards go "God did we, did anybody record that?", did anybody hit, you know, hit record and capture all of those really, really neat things that that folks shared about, about ways of working and about, you know, what it meant to be doing research together in a particular way. And you know, there was another there was an event last year as well, where we had a bit of a panel discussion, and we came together for a planning meeting and then had had the panel discussion right then and there. And so there was sort of a sense of when we actually came to doing it work out, you know, how can we recreate that. So hopefully, I think in this space, we can finally record and document some of those really rich conversations with with folks. I don't know if that was really a good introduction of who I am. But I, I think that some of the main bits and pieces are there.

Chris 03:40

Thanks, Rama, and thanks for sparing my vocal cords as well. So I'm Chris, and I work at Victoria University. I used to be in the Community Psychology program, but I've switched over into doing research, research and research training a lot more. And we do quite a bit of that through this. This network that we've developed at Victoria University called the Community Identity and Displacement Research Network. But the words that we're talking about here, is really a way of looking or being with and alongside group groups of groups of people and trying to figure out where and how might we use the resources of the university in ways that can support, and develop, and contribute to the objectives and aspirations that comes from community groups. So it's, so for me, it's always been a little bit about how do I use and think about the discipline, which I think community psychology is interested in contextual knowledge production. It's talks about being ethical that uses language of empowerment or liberation and community, so so part of it really for me is about What do those sorts of things look like? What do they mean? When we go out of the university space and position ourselves or like take ourselves in, in other in other life world and in other pathways? And then how do we, I guess, create and think critically about the issues of power, issues of ethics, but also just the capacity and potential of anything to do transformative work. Because often we, we say that we're transforming things and all that stuff. But this really just saying, Well, what might psychology look like if it makes the claim? Or? Or it's not even? Sometimes it's not even that massive of an agenda. Just look, how can we do things with each other that challenges structural violence or challenges violence in the everyday but also that looks at what are the sorts of things that we do that actually brings joy, that brings safety, that brings security but also that, that makes us feel good when we are with with other people, it's can be as simple as that. But there's lots of things that get in the way of that. So anyway, so that's the sort of, sort of things that we've been been doing. Yeah. And we give a big name, but sometimes it feels like they really little things.

Natalie Kivell 06:20

Thanks, Chris. And one of the things that I think is gonna be really lovely about this episode is we have different projects in this space, members and participants and people who kind of curated and imagined these different projects across some of these shared pieces that we're talking about around kind of

relationality and connection, and how we kind of situate ourselves and community research. And so I would love to hear from the folks who are here from Next in color to really think about who are you, who are you, because I have the pleasure of knowing some of the people on this podcast, but I'm just meeting you all for the first time. And our listeners will be hearing about this project for the first time. So who are you? And can you share a little bit about your work and your you know, how you understand or think about, like the importance of that project in the way that it was done. And we will hear more about the next color project throughout the episode. So you can feel free to give us all the lovely teasers about what it is and why it is something that we should be talking about in this space. So Geskeva, would you want to start us off?

Geskeva Komba 07:24

Sure. So, to everyone that's listening. My name is Geskeva Komba. And I am 1/3 of next in color. And we are a creative collective that deliver a series of activations through literary work, but also visual work and workshops that we kind of collaborate with other individual artists in community particularly, and predominantly, from the African community. And we do that by, you know, collaborating and co-designing all of the work that we do. And also we collaborate with organizations, local government council, and nonprofit organizations as well.

Natalie Kivell 08:17

I know we'll probably hear more about it. But can you tell me what you mean by activations?

Geskeva Komba 08:22

When I say activation, so basically, like we could have a local government council that has a space or want to kind of involve a particular community group in a space and so we would co design or collaborate with a nonprofit or local government council to kind of activate that space or activate a particular art medium, art medium for community or for young people, or whoever the target audience is, and bring them to this space or go to them, to activate particular spaces or particular thinking as well with community.

Natalie Kivell 09:10

That sounds lovely, and really thinking about like how, yeah, I am very excited for all the things we're gonna be talking about. But thank you, Geskeva, as you want to tell us a little bit about yourself.

Ez Eldin Deng 09:24

So, my name is Ez Eldin Deng. I'm one of the next in color and also an artist, filmmaker, a youth worker. And basically, my work has a history with Australian, who, who has grown like the African community in the last like, two decades or two decades, or 20, 20 years. And there are many ways that that immigrants have come to Australia, whether through immigration process, or humanitarian program, which is, I was lucky me and my family to be part of. And then through all of those things, when I came to Australia faced a lot of challenges, and also find myself in a space where they, they call

it community. And I couldn't exit that, because that's what I was identify with. But through through working in the community, I have identified that no one else from the outside world will come in, and help and support and encourage and celebrate community events. And, and, and then, you know, I just kind of accepted that I'm part of the community. So I've started to do work in creative spaces, theater, music, and then film, which is something new that a lot of like Africans are getting into now. And thank God through social media, and also to this podcast, which is, is gonna take our voices outside of Australia, and this is exactly what's happening. And then in terms of Next in color, and how we activate these spaces, is literally revisiting spaces that we've been, we've been through anyway, we've been through before, is just different people are from African communities are coming through the past that part, so what we do is to kind of like activate it through art, through music, poetry, zine, all processes, from a different perspective, and see how those organizations work with the community, and hear their stories and their voices. Because eventually, they apply for those government grants to be able to serve the community, they call immigrants, or refugees, or, minority. And that's those words, we still working and trying to kind of like change, change that, because we've got our own name that we would like to, you know, put in place. And it's going to take a long time because there's so many organizations working with so many minority communities. And next in color, you know, it's doing work slowly, but surely we creating a major impact.

Natalie Kivell 12:34

Thanks as that added layers for me to kind of understanding the project, and really thinking about like, what it means to, I like what you said about like, these spaces have already existed, and people have already moved through these spaces, but now we're kind of taking these spaces in ways that are meaningful and you know, actually add value to the community. I also love that you put that in quotations which we can totally problematize and I'm just gonna pass it over to Ruth to introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about your your work in next and color.

Ruth Nyaruot Ruach 13:12

Hi, my name is Ruth Nyaruot Ruach. I am a South Sudanese multidisciplinary artists. Most of my disciplinary practice is around photography, poetry, against textile, and zine making. A lot of my work really explores the understanding and the intersection of being a third culture kid here on stolen unceded land. A lot of my work also is about challenging the cultural and traditional structures that women experience within the South Sudanese culture, and how we can liberate ourselves and how we can heal ourselves through using art as a ancestral practice and ancestral play. And a lot of my work really is about deconstructing what it means to be a black woman on stolen country. So you know how to exist in the corporate world, I always say that I identify myself as a corporate gangsta, really being the bridge between community and organization. And using decolonial practices to disrupt the way we have access to spaces. A lot of my thinking and my ethos in the practice that I do in the art spaces is really about the fact that community has the tools to create the table. And the only requirement is that we bring our own chairs, because a lot of the times in this industry, especially the community arts spaces, there's a lot of gatekeeping and segregation and you know, racism, discrimination, all of that, that really stops us

from being included in the table. So what we tend to do at Next in color is just create a space and create that table where it's a offering space for community to come and engage. We know that as black people our lives are already politicize. So the art practice that, I guess the methodologies that we use in Next in color is really just about not politicizing our narratives. And just really purely, I guess, exploring the identities of who we are as souls, as spirits, as humans. And really just, I guess, looking at ourselves as people and not attaching ourselves with this, I guess, narratives that were given to us by outsiders and observers, so, yeah.

Natalie Kivell 15:32

Thank you. I love that we need to bring our own chairs. That's gonna stay with me. And so like I said, we have other projects here. And actually, Sam, you're gonna have to tell me how you situate or if you're just a lovely floater in the space. But we'll hear from Sam and then Roshani. And I was thinking about how you know, because we're such a large group, we're taking a little bit longer with introductions, but like getting layers and layers about what it is that we're doing, and why it is meaningful, right? Sometimes we think that the relationship, the building blocks are not the doing, it is this thing that gets us to the doing, rather than, like, this integrally important thing to build the connections and relationships and spaces for this kind of dialogue to exist, is, in fact, the, you know, the action, the thing that we that we are doing, or at least one of the many things that we are doing. And I'm hearing that from all of you. And so I'm loving this, though, we're kind of still hanging out and introductions, they feel really powerful. So Sam, no pressure, over over to you.

Sam Keast 16:37

Thanks, Natalie. My name is Sam, I work at Victoria University with Chris on stolen country in Nam, otherwise known as Melbourne, Australia. I guess I am a floater which I thoroughly enjoy. Thanks, Natalie, it's, I really treasure that position, or, or we might call it border work, I'm not sure or at the margins, which is a really important part, I think of what we're all talking about in this idea of accompanying, and how we move in and out of perhaps these institutions or organizations. And some of I guess what my role is help how are we making sense of it within the institution, because they're all those requirements. But more importantly, like I think Chris said, how does that leverage university resources for these kinds of community oriented projects? And the other thing I think, I was gonna say is, is that you've already heard all the people from next in color and the complexity in which in which they are theorizing, it doesn't need for us to theorize onto them from from institutions. So this idea of accompaniment becomes really important, because what is our role? And so some of that is, I guess, we're trying to shape as people who work within these institutions called universities, how are we making sense of our role, and also the particularities which we don't necessarily need to get into, of community psychology in Australia, which has its own constraints. In terms of a discipline area that we're always trying to push out out from, or expand the ecologies of knowledge from, I think is probably, yeah,

Natalie Kivell 18:11

Yeah. And that's a commonality you hear a lot through a lot of the episodes we have, right? You know, in the Indonesian episode, very much like how does community psychology resist that kind of hegemony of psychology and institutional spaces. And, you know, we have these unique manifestations of it in the histories of Australia or Canada, or Indonesia or Chile. But then we have these common struggles to what is that role of relationship and power between this kind of binary of Academy and community as if they are somehow these very kind of separate things that don't have these nuanced connections and relationships. Oh, Roshani last, working in the community radio side of things, welcome. And then, you know, we have heard a little bit about Next in color. And so I'd love to hear a little bit about you. But also, you know, how does this community radio project of yours come in and complement and relate to some of the conversations around accompaniment.

Roshani 19:05

Yeah, for sure. Yeah. So for those of you who don't know me, my name is Roshani. So I work on the stolen Land of the Woiwurrung and Boonwurrung people at Victoria University in Melbourne, Australia. And so I'm a researcher and PhD student in the space of community psychology. And my main body of research sort of involves me working with communities. So specifically a group of young people from the local government area of Brimbank, which is located in Melbourne's west. And so working with and alongside these young people in crafting and governing a community radio program called Brimbank Live, which is sort of a setting that enables self-determined processes of creating and sharing stories about our lives as young people through the tool of radio. And so I guess, as a young person, myself, who's engaged in the program, not just through the research process, but in the program as a participant, but also being located and this work being located in the local community that I was born in, and I live in and I grew up in, I sort of document the process of how sites for youth governance and resistance and liberation, can form and emerge for young people. And also interested in how creative vehicles can be used to tell the stories and articulate community knowledge and identities and experiences and what types of stories we as young people choose to come and share through our radio space. So more broadly, I guess my work sits within the larger body of work that we're all part of, in this sort of community, Psych arts research space, you know, working with different organizations, and there's sort of connections that I guess my project has with next in color, but ultimately, being tied through doing work with community, in community and accompanying community and being embedded in the processes of doing my research.

Natalie Kivell 21:07

Thanks Roshani. And one of the things that you know, is kind of coming out from it, you all talked about really lovely things, resources, organizations, and, you know, thinking about, you know, the listeners out there that we will be curating as these these resources will be available, because we can't fit all of it into one podcast, one space. And so how we can take some of the things we're talking about today and dive a little bit deeper. And so you know, Brimbank radio, I know that Rama with some of your partners, I'm not sure who has written what, but I've seen many things come through like communitypsychology.com, and through the journals on their next in color work. So thinking about

now, before we go into some of the kind of project orientations, I want to pivot us to this idea of, you know, across the projects that you all have created, you are looking at these - kind of wrapped up in the idea of relationality and accompaniment and challenging this idea of hierarchy and kind of academic community relationships, wanted to highlight or the idea of stories, all of the work that you're doing is really grounded in stories and community knowledge and community voice. So this idea of like, why stories matter? And maybe we'll start there, and then we'll parse apart a couple of other things. But we're really talking about kind of voice knowledge and storytelling. So why do stories matter? Why is this so important in the work that you're doing across these different projects?

Sam Keast 22:38

Feels like a whole podcast episode in itself, Natalie.

Geskeva Komba 22:42

I was thinking Ez, do you want to go first?

Chris 22:45

Yeah, before Ez goes?

Ez Eldin Deng 22:46

Yeah, sure. Yeah, well, as Sam said, you know, it could be like a whole episode by itself, but storytelling it's important because it's not just stories, just the words that come with it, is the experience that that someone else would kind of like share, whether through words, whether through poetry, pictures, script writing, messages, affirmation, study, so all of those are story, but they've got like different titles. And the reason being, why it's important is because we don't lose our identity, our sense of belonging, communication, also how to identify some key issues that are happening within the community and be able to kind of like, speak about it in historic form, because it's the only safe way that everybody else's can connect to what otherwise we wouldn't have like society. And it storytellers, the better responsibility to be able to shape the society that we live in, or destroy the society that we live in. So the greatest storytellers, they, they, you know, they're about 50%. And then people who listen to it is about 50%. And now, there's an issue there, because there's no, nobody is compromising, to take on the story. And either to kind of like own it, or be part of the story, or just a character in that story. For them to be able to kind of lead the story and then that story will inspire the younger generation or they inspire the future generation or they inspire the people who are living in this society right now. Or otherwise, we we just kind of like lost sheep in the middle of big field, where we just become followers of nothingness, but space and time. And just be, and which is fair enough, we are human beings, and by making mistakes is sorted by itself, because we can learn from that, and we note it down. And by noting it down, we can tell someone else "Don't do that mistake, because I've done it before". And it goes deeper into into a lot of things, because a lot of people can write stories. But how, can they listen though? Are they part of the listening, because listening important. And then the words are powerful as well. But if you just telling the story without listening, what's the point of me listening to your story, if

we can't really focus and try to understand the listening, and by understanding the listening, then we'll be able to kind of like, create a healthy boundaries, within people's mind, people's heart, people's soul, people in spiritual, whatever that might be, whether it's religious, or just self care, and then it will break it down into smaller, smaller, smaller, smaller scale will be a family family unit. So the story, there's always an elder who shares a story that will actually give you values, respect, how to protect yourself in this society, and also how to build a character, and how to become a, how to become a valuable person within the society as individual with your own story, or otherwise, nobody else will, will tell you your own story. So that's, that's, that's for me.

Ruth Nyaruot Ruach 26:56

As I just wanted to ask, what what like, I wanted me to speak further about black gold, like, why was it important for us to tell those stories? And why was it important for us to use filmmaking as a vessel to I guess, yeah, explore the stories and the intersections within that film.

Ez Eldin Deng 27:21

Yeah, thanks for asking that question. Well, for me, this couple of things there. First, is the representation of the African people, African communities within Australia. And then secondly, we all share a common story, but we all living in in different areas, different places, different departments, different units, and then we can't really see our commonality at all, but through film, you'll be able to kind of like put that on the screen. And then 100 people will just kind of watch it, and say, "You know what, I see myself in those characters, as I know, what they're going through, I can identify myself within those characters". And also and also, and also God give me a gift. So I had to kind of like using in some, some ways, and not be selfish and just put it in the cabin somewhere. But to me, it was literally it's by bringing the African African characters in the silver screen.

Rama 28:34

It's a very tough job because as as you're talking something, so black gold, which is the short film that you guys produced through Next in color, and, and something that, you know, I really struck me from the film is that you've got a place or a setting, you know, so the flats, was it, what were they the Fitzroy flats.

Geskeva Komba 28:56

It was a Flemington public house.

Rama 28:58

That's right, Flemington public housing estates, which is a very specific location, right, that's, you know, very of this place, but then there's all these, like, really beautiful connections to, to, you know, African activists and poets and writers and American, you know, American activists and thinkers. And so you've got all these, these connections to diaspora that are that are coming back to this really specific place. And yeah, I think that was such a really interesting thing about. And the thing that you're talking there is

about, about those connections. And I'm, I'm throwing in a question now but I'm interested in what that sort of, that meant to be able to connect to those, those broader figures in in history to this really specific place and time and location, and what that means.

Ez Eldin Deng 29:52

Yeah, so. Well, it's just, for Black Gold, actually started as small, you know. It was the writer, Sammy, who said that he wants to write a story for himself because no one is writing, you know, any story about him. And he's gonna write a story for him and his brother. And he's just like one scene. And then to me, I saw a bigger picture. And that bigger picture is like these two characters, they, you know, they would have just traveled the world and asked him like, okay with this story where you want it to go, and he said, as big as as Hollywood. Like, Okay, well, we can write it properly, and it was during the lockdown. And then, and then Black Lives Matter Movement was happening in America, he got inspired to write. And I'm like, this story, it's American, it doesn't relate to Australia, but we need to find the story that belongs to us here. And, and we both kind of like lived in Flemington flats, where we actually shot the film. And he wrote a story. And then we started to bring different people from different different creative practices, from producers, galleries, here to writers, camera, personnel, costumes, music. So we all come from different backgrounds. And we like, Okay, we wanted to tell the story just for our own. But what happened with that story, it kind of like traveled the world first. And then we brought it to Flemington flat, which is what we identify ourselves with. And at the same time, what really made it work was during the lockdown, there was like a heavy lockdown of the building for five days. And it was traumatizing, not just for the people who live in the in the building, but with the immigrant, as well as outside and to us. We're like Okay, we're gonna write this story that belongs to us. And it's going to be in Flemington. And the story is going to travel the world. And it did. And I'm just like, proud of everybody who got involved. So with what I said earlier regarding the stories with Blackboard story, and we will continue to tell the stories of our own here in Australia. And for to kind of enrich, the Diaspora people over there because they don't believe, like, like people who live in, in this in this country. And and it's very, very sad. And yeah.

Ruth Nyaruot Ruach 32:36

Now, I just wanted to add, I guess one of the grounding factors in imagining the coloring book, which is currently now a three part series, a online, kind of deconstructed zine. And it just goes back to the questions like, Why are stories important? I think for myself, as somebody that comes from Sudan, the history of Sudan is that our libraries got burned down during the urbanization of Sudan. We also were colonized so a lot of our stories, were taken, a lot of our literal, our books, you know, any information that was kept was stolen. So the role that we play as Next in color is knowledge keepers in a sense, and how do we become the narrators and the protagonists of our own stories? How do we reclaim language? And how do we reclaim the way that we talk about ourselves outside of black trauma, but also celebrating Black joy? Like, what does that look like from my perspective? So I think that stories are very important, because essentially, we are elders, we don't have to necessarily be 60 years old. But we are practicing that ancestral play in this current moment right now, because essentially, we're activating

that energy. So then we're able to pass that to the next generation, because it's important for us to narrate our own stories, and when we narrate our own stories, we know what the characters are, and who these characters are, because those characters maybe will emphasize the lived experience as we have, I think, is really important to give community autonomy and agency over the way that they speak about themselves, you know, whether it's in, whether it's through English or other language, or whether it's explored through photography, or film, or music, but just giving offering that space for individuals to really talk about who they are, and to speak about their stories. And a lot of the times when in this landscape, in this colonial matrix that we exist in, a lot of the times when you talk about the hardship and the trauma that you've experienced as a black individual is so romanticize that there isn't a lot of offering for joy or just for your existence to really be explored. So the space that we create at Next in color is really just about like, you know, Who are you? What is your story? And how can we facilitate that space in giving you opportunities to maybe be involved with black gold, or the coloring book or the other activations that we have. So I think, you know, us being the knowledge keepers of our communities is really important because we are driving that, that reclaiming, you know, our sense of identity and the experiences that we had, and telling our stories from our own experience instead of, you know, when I say outsiders and observers, but you know, non people of color, talking about who we are, you know, when we, when I migrated here and my family migrated here. I guess the process of assimilation is that we were labeled as, like refugees and migrants. And that wasn't really a narrative that we wanted to put on ourselves. But that was the narrative of the, you know, the outside world saw us as, and that was something that lingered for a long time, because that destabilize our reality as people that was experiencing displacement. So we were not humanized, and looked at as, as people that traveled and cross waters and fees to, you know, to a new world, but were seen as people that were, you know, that wanted a space or that were running away from something. So it's really just about, you know, owning and reclaiming who we are, and really telling our stories, the way that we need to tell our stories, and a lot of it is, I'm going to talk a lot about ancestral play. But a lot of the way that we share and tell stories is through oral, so it's really just about, you know, like acting as ancestors in this current, yeah, plain.

Natalie Kivell 36:37

Thanks Ruth. I can only imagine that others want to jump in. But I'm going to add a layer to the question, because the other piece that we wanted to explore together was this idea. And I think it's coming up in what we're talking about with stories is the idea as culture as the site of, and this is kind of the ways that this question was co-constructed as culture as the site of resistance, repair, survival and cultural practice. So Ruth, I think you've touched on some of those things. It's kind of stories as some of this kind of like reclamation or crew, or a kind of holding on to that kind of culture as resistance and as survival. But as we hear from other people, those idea of stories, how do you see those stories kind of grounded in this idea of culture as resistance, repair and survival, and the work that you're doing?

Roshani 37:28

I'm happy to jump in. I think I just want to echo what Ruth and Ez mentioned around, yeah, this idea that, you know, because even with Brimbank lives, and these young people coming together to create

their own stories, it was really rooted in the, in the knowledge that we know that when stories are constructed about us, it's without us being part of that process. And so, you know, these stories are told about young people and people on the margins, often by those outside of the community. So there's always this discrepancy, and this misrepresentation that is continual through through the way that our stories are told. And so, this idea of creating settings, where we are able to speak back and have that resistance and speak to dominant narratives, and construct them in our own ways, and talk about our navigations of the violence that that we may experience. But then also, this idea that the creation of new stories, or the creation of resistance leads to sort of processes of building new stories and stories of joy and stories, you know, about the aspirations of young people in the passions of young people. And also just reframing the idea that we are not always those romanticized, at risk, sort of narratives that are out there in the world. And that we're so much more. So it's this idea of complexity, but also reclamation and re-signifying our lives. And so I think that stories are important, as well, to, I guess, be not just, you know, reclaiming, but also, as, you know, archives that we get to keep and things that we get to share and things that we get to broadcast. And that sort of ties in with, you know, this, the cultural activities, but also the cultural artifacts that come out of creating stories and zines or creating stories through radio that become podcasts. So I think that there is yet a lot to say about why we use particular tools to do what we do when we tell these stories because they have sort of the uniqueness and power that allows us to have them passed through time and through place.

Chris 39:58

Thanks Roshani. Geskeva, did you have a response to that question as well?

Geskeva Komba 40:03

Yeah, I do. I think, for myself when I think about, you know, culture as a side of repair, reclamation, and, you know, that connects us to identity, I really think about how it also allows people to really sit in their subject position, and really sit and share their subject position in a way that it transcends just how we move through the world, as we are when we're just, you know, having conversations, or we're just doing our day to day life tasks and things like that. And so for me, when I think about storytelling, and how we share stories, I feel like, it's a really important part of sharing who we are, and where we're, where we're from, and our histories, and also looking back at how that informs our selves, and how we move through the world as well, and I guess, that's what really inspires me. It doesn't matter where I'm sitting, or what space or field of work that I would be, you know, working in, as long as I'm able to share experiences and stories with people in any shape or form, then that's where I kind of get my motivation, inspiration, because I'm learning and understanding how other people see and exist in the world. And that's what I really enjoy about the work that we do as Next in color. And also just the work that is done in community, through the projects that I've worked on in the past as an artist and just as a creative, like doing music and theatre, and film. And that what gives me, that's what gives me purpose, you know, hearing those stories, and sharing those stories and being part of, you know, those stories, and just really trying to understand and sit with it. And I think that's really, really important for us to be able to navigate and really, you know, build a strong understanding of how we communicate with each other

and how we move through the world. And, you know, it is really important, like Ruth said, to, for people to be able to have that space, you know, to, to play and to connect to ancestral knowledge and to connect to a culture and to connect to, you know, others who are able to provide that sort of thinking and provide that sort of space. So that then we can do the other things that we need to do in our lives as well. I think it's a really, really strong foundation in terms of who we are and who we want to be and how we want to exist in the world. And if we don't have that, then it really disconnects our minds to our hearts and also to other people, you know, and how we connect to other people. And, and so that's a really, really important and core part to, you know, working and doing the things that we do.

Chris 43:37

I'm sort of listening to this, and I'm getting excited about some other bits that we've, that we've been thinking about. And I'm just thinking this, this idea of, I guess there's lots of things around storytelling as methods, storytelling as practice, the vehicles that we use for storytelling, storytelling in relation to culture, culture as meaning, as a system for meaning and meaning making but then also, all of the stuff that people have said is about the fact that other people have always the official story, the official story about other communities or the official institutional story that constructs people as a lifelong refugee or as a lifelong culturally and linguistically diverse other. But I think what comes out of this year, I think the way that Ruth talks about ancestral knowledge keepers, but claiming that role or position yourself as being as mediator between yeah, the different cultures or different histories, different memories, different and how that gets mobilized in the present, as an act of, maybe it's sovereignty, as an act of self determination. And I think this has been quite central to, to the thinking here. That it is claiming an agency not only in response to a counter story. And for me, the work that Next in color has done has been so important because it's not always about responding to, it is about responding to, but not always responding to the system. But it is about, well, what are these knowledge archives, and I'd say, what is the black gold that we draw on, to talk about joy, to talk about African and other diaspora's knowledges that's always left out, or it's almost like people come here with nothing but a label of refugee that gets put on on them. But there's long histories, long archives, and for me, the black gold story that they talked about, the gold in that when you said, the end of gold is the books, the history, the archives, the memory, the joy, the music, all of these sorts of things that are there but undervalued, devalued or not valued, in this context, because of how people are stripped of histories through these institutional processes. So I think that that and the work that Next in color do, the more I listen to it all the time, the more you just see new, new insights, and so forth. So when we think about the story, we have to do the work in the university to actually be, to do this work of correcting where knowledge is produced, how it is produced, and whose knowledge gets to be supreme. Because a lot of it is that you have, like you said, there's experts who come in and they come and sort things out. But then there's also others who come in, and they'll take things away. But this really is about knowledge, knowledge production from, with and inside communities. And this is what, the way that you've talked, that is what this looks like. And so part of, I think part of the thing for us, is how do we then reposition what it is that that we do from the space of the university, when so much of what happens in the university is about expertise, it's about extracting things, and so forth. So it's also having to figure out countercultural activity within the university itself, I

think, if we call it that, but it is about I mean, just to create those spaces, that's generative. And I think, you know, the other thing that comes out, as you were talking is, is this thing about like Sam US border, I think, Ruth, you use the being the cultural broker in between, I think ancestral knowledge, your own experiences, and so on. And so there's this thing about what diasporic locations opens up. That is there's multiple communities, multiple histories and multiple memories that people work with, as they reimagine things. And that is the site. That for me is the decolonial standpoint that we tried, that we tried to talk about, about when what are these multiple structures, but also what are these multiple possibilities that we navigating when we find ourselves at the intersection of many and multiple borders. So it's just the embracing that complexity, but I think these vehicles are beyond text, yeah? So art, culture, and just the other sorts of ways of being and knowing that's been opened up, through learning, learning with, with this group, Next in color that's been so inspiring, I think, for us to think back into community psychology, who also wants to, wants to, wants to amplify the tales of joy, as opposed to the tales of terror as land borders, as written in comm psych, but also the other ways of knowing that goes beyond positivism, that embraces human centered knowing, that centers experience, that centers voice, that centers culture, all of these resources that we use to do the things that gives us meaning and affirms identity and affirms connectedness.

Geskeva Komba 49:03

Yeah, I also wanted to add that like, thinking about some of the things that everybody has said so far, is that it's not about having the answers to whatever issues that we had, you know, it's about the process, and it's about thinking through and moving through and doing through, you know, the current situations or circumstances that we're in, and, you know, a really important thing that, you know, triggered my own, I guess praxis and my own thinking was, I was traveling with friends in 2018, and we were going to decoloniality summer school. And prior to that, I was traveling to different countries in East Africa. And then there was one point where we were in Uganda, and I I was at a market and I was having a chat to a store owner, who I was mentioning, you know, what my traveling was about and things like that. And then I mentioned the summer school to him. And then, you know, after him hearing about where I live, and where I'm from, and things like that, he's just like, "Ah, you're the best, you're the best person or you have in your experience is the best person to go and learn those things". Because of that exilic consciousness or that that diasporic, you know, standpoint that I have. I did not understand what he meant at all. I just left it, I was like, Okay. And then I get to the summer school, and after the two weeks, I like, reflect, and, you know, I think through the whole journey and experience of like, you know, going from country to country, and also, you know, being in my own ancestral, like hometown for, from where my mom comes from, which is the Comoros islands, and that has its own, you know, contentious and complex history, and then also Tanzania, where my dad is from, and, you know, there's the end of the summer school, and I was like, "Ah, I get it", I get what he finally meant, you know, it's just, you know, going back to that whole thing, it's just a bit not about having the answers, it's about going through the process of, you know, having those conversations and the sharing of the stories, and so that, you know, there are small pieces to a puzzle of yourself and to the world, and how you connect to other people as well. And like, that's what I really like, is that when things land for you, even though they might land for

you straight away, or their lands for you, you know, a few weeks later, things like that, when you have those moments, and you have these epiphanies and things like that, and you're doing this sort of work, that's like, also, as some weird form of like, you know, liberation as well, because you get to build this whole world and perspective, that's not just your own. And that's just and it's not convoluted, but also, you know, is informed by so many different experiences and connections that you make to with other people.

Natalie Kivell 52:29

I think Sam kind of hit it on the head earlier, when he said, you know, any of these questions could be an entire series of a podcast. And I'm feeling that very much right now. Because I feel like we also have so much that we want to offer. So I'm just going to gently move us to the next question, because I think that we can really relate it in that, you know, if we have people listening or thinking that all some really lovely, and it's resistant to the way that we're supposed to fit into, like, neoliberal institutions and, and do things in particular ways, but like, what does it look like? What does it look like in our everyday work? And how do we do things like this relational, ongoing practice, when we have things like grants and publications, and all of these things that we're kind of trying to put together, so that does work. And anyway, I'm probably going into my own work too much there, and the frustrations I'm facing, but you know, for people who are like, this is what I think I want to be doing, but don't quite feel like I'm doing, what does it look like? So can we maybe have you share, like a particular example or a particular moment, maybe in the work that shows you know, in this everyday space, like this is how we make this happen, that's how we sustain it, or this is how we kind of built the connections. Did that question make sense? I feel like I've veered a bit but, really grounding it in some some examples for folks.

Geskeva Komba 53:57

I might just blow this up a bit, though. Because, like, it's not just about the actual practice, or the tools that we use. It's also transcending that, you know, and not limiting ourselves to those particular tools, whether it's doing it through film, whether it's doing it through photography, or whether it's sharing stories, you know, the way that Roshani does, you know, in Brimbank live, it's really transcending those disciplines and those forms and really being like, "Okay, if this might not be the fit right now, but let me" and giving us the- I can't find the right word for it, but giving us the actual license to do whatever it is that we need to do to connect with whatever it is that we're experiencing, or whatever story it is that we need to share and I think particularly for Next in color, we don't really try to tie ourselves to a particular medium or an art form, in a sense, where we have to always tell it through this type of lens. And even though we come from particular backgrounds and experiences in different art forms, we make sure that like, okay, maybe this might not be the right fit, how can we explore it in some in another way, and really making sure that like, we are also not, you know, being shackled by some of the things that we are used to doing. Do you know what I mean? And it's kind of like it again, it's a form of liberation, that you know, that you don't have to specifically use one way of working, you know, to do something, and I guess, with saying that, like, for us, the art forms that we use, and the way that we work is, you know, we write through literary work in terms of like the zines, which Ruth co edits with individual

artists that we contract, and we collaborate with to kind of, you know, curate this scene where various artists submit their work for this scene, and then we release it online. And so there's that, and so that's part of the doing, but then we also, you know, use film, and we use visual arts as a way to, you know, share the work that we do and share our experiences. And then we also do things like have workshops or sessions, where it's about conversation and having conversation and the process of conversation in a facilitated way. And so, it's really not being tied to a way of doing things, but really just exploring: okay, what's the best way to share the work that we're doing?

Natalie Kivell 57:17

Yeah, no, please, please have it. I was just gonna say, I think that that names one of the things that you do, which is asking those questions and having those processes right, as kind of like really grounding that you're right, we don't have to kind of fit into a particular tool. But if we have these connections and processes and how we navigate those things together, that's in and of itself, one of those kinds of practices that that can demonstrate that kind of flexibility and fluidity necessary to do that. Sam, sorry, I cut you off there.

Sam Keast 57:44

No, that's okay. I was actually, I was gonna riff a bit off that because I think it's really important if we're talking about listeners thinking, what does this look like? The time and the friendship and the very everyday nature, and Rama can probably speak better to this because this is not been and isn't a short term, or aren't short term projects. They've run over an incredibly long time and have been built on relationships that have existed for many, many years, centered through Chris and some of his networks. But I think that's a really important aspect. Because, as you say, often what we get caught up in are these very short term or, you know, very sort of pragmatic things that we have to do and how do we implement bang, bang? And what are their outcomes? And how do we write them? But this, this is an extension of an ongoing network of people that have moved in and through different projects, but it's been maintained through I guess, that kind of that relationality from a call or an ethic of care and relationality as a part of the ongoing work. And sometimes it is just very everyday, making time to go to hang out with people, to just be human and not be just, you know, sort of, I guess, research focused or institutionally focused. But I'll leave Rama to talk a bit more about that.

Rama 59:02

Yeah, thanks, Sam. I was thinking, I was pretty fortunate, in that you know, I think Chris I first met you, some, some years ago now when I was doing my undergraduate degree. And my psychology undergraduate degree, and I think, Chris, you'd already been working with Lis and who had worked with a lot of these folks as well, for some years and had some really strong relationships. And then it was through that relationship with Chris that I connected in with, I think Mez first and Ez and a couple of other folks. And I think I really had the benefit of having formed those relationships over a long period of time and in some way was also insulated a little bit from, from perhaps the ways of doing things in university that are a little bit more normal. And so I think I had on one hand, you know, a sense of

learning to be a researcher within an institution, but then also doing another set of learning from the relationships that that I got to have with you at the time, they were producing gas guzzlers producing a show with as and some other folks called Amkor. Which, which I was I was able to be involved in, in doing an evaluation for and documenting some of that work as well. And so that, that then formed on to the later work that we did. So, yeah, I think I think that there was a real benefit in being able to sort of have that experience evolving from that set of relationships, rather than coming in with a particular set of ways of working and then having to adapt. And I think, yeah, it was a really valuable learning process. And I think the way that, I guess we spent time together in in some really fundamental ways.

Chris 1:01:12

So I think, I mean, I think when it comes to the some of these sorts of things in the in the every day, I guess, I think about the the hanging out, and sometimes we go and hang out with Next in color at where they work. But I think importantly, we've also created spaces in the university for hanging out and I think maybe CIDRN (Community Identity and Displacement Research Network) our talk group is just that, this practice might be that we come together to have conversations about our projects. And sometimes it's just organized around an article, or sometimes it's just organized around people's experiences. So they, they seem like fairly routine, mundane activities, nothing exceptional, nothing out of the ordinary, but they're actually quite important practices for people to have conversations and to test each other's understanding of things. So those ordinary settings are actually things where maybe sometimes extraordinary things can happen for people. It doesn't, you know, it doesn't have to, it doesn't have to be as like, Oh my God, we've created this big, massive new thing. So the everyday cultural activity, the act of listening, or being with people and asking questions, is actually maybe undervalued. But really important, so we sort of maybe just engaging with things, it's almost like taken for granted, but making them into really important settings where we can accompany, right? Because often it's often it's about devising projects, having the answers already, and then going to test ideas. But this is a little bit different, because we're actually going into places and I think Kenneth and Mary Gergen talk about the Hurly burly of what Everyday life and we want to be part of that. And yeah, we go and we understand, like Ez said, these places have been, there's different people going through them with different ideas, different experiences. So the places can be the same anymore they have to change because different people, different aspirations fill them and they have to do new things. So that's, that's the sort of way I guess, in which we do that. So it's nothing. I mean, for me, it doesn't sound like or feel like it's anything exceptional. It's only exceptional, because there's a pressure on us to do more things and so forth. So we just say, well. And I think Ruth, you've talked about this, I mean, the importance of creating spaces in those settings, where you guys are creating spaces, how important they are, for you to validate each other's thinking, to validate each other's experiences, because sometimes the structures that we do this work within can be very tough places. Yeah, they can be very difficult places. And so where and how do you create the setting that become settings of respite, or settings of care, or settings for revitalization? To do things. So I think that that idea of the everyday but also creating settings or creating spaces to do the sort of work that SK work that is imagined, that is enacting imagination, but then it also refueling, you know and then you go from there with a collective. You know that you're not

doing this by yourself but you've got a group of people that you do this work with. And so that setting like Matt said before, and others whether the setting reaches to ancestral knowledges or other knowledges or whatever the setting reaches out to, the networks through like this podcast whether it reaches out to the global networks, where there's other people having these sorts of conversations. So it grows, it sort of grows. So the work Natalie is like you do teaching stuff, you do reading, you know, but you also do like Maslin will apply for grants. It's not the university and we can support the grants that they apply for, because they need resources, just like universities need resources, we need resources. But we try to do these things together, and we about supporting each other in those endeavors to, so that we can build the structures that can support the sort of work that they want to do that, that we want to do. And that we need to do. Because otherwise, others might do them with a different lens. And with a different agenda.

Roshani 1:05:57

I was just gonna say, in reference to what everyone said, around how the settings form, I think like, it's one thing to build a setting, but to maintain a particular space and setting is really hard. And it's messy, and especially when they sit within institutions, or there's particular institutional constraints. You know, even when you have those ties and those relations, there's the broader context of fundings and grants. And, you know, the fact that, especially for Brimbank live happened during COVID, so the fact that there's so much other things going on, and so how do you continue to maintain these spaces. And I think that, whilst settings may change, and they'll change form, and they might disappear, and they might be around for a particular time. And then they might cease to exist. It's the continuation of what transcends after that. So, you know, Brimbank live doesn't continue on as a radio program, per se, but the young people who have been connected into the community space and, you know, work as mentors on other art projects, or they've taken their skills that they learned from doing radio, and they've gone on to, you know, host community events and things like that. So thinking about this work being done beyond this setting is also really important. Because there's a sense of flexibility, when you're working in building and maintaining these spaces, they're not always going to look the same, they're always going to change, people are going to come and go. But it's about getting the relationships that also tie that together, which is really important and the connections that are still kept, even if people aren't continuing to be in the setting, or if they're not, in that particular program, how do those ties still hold, even after that? So I think that that's really important as well, when thinking about how do you do this work? And how do you build these settings? Like how do you also maintain them as well and maintain those connections?

Natalie Kivell 1:07:54

Yeah, I think that's a really lovely way of wrapping this up that this is not project based, this is relationally based, right, but all of the things that continue to emerge in different places, in different ways that might be unexpected, and help to sustain some of that work. And sometimes when I find I'm trying to describe this in my own work, it's like, I don't have the language for it. But it's a feeling or it's an experience where you know, like something in the way that I'm doing this right now doesn't feel like the way that it does when I'm grounded in spaces with people that I care about. And I've put that

kind of time and relational effort into building the spaces that I want to be part of. And we don't always have that time. So thinking about the fact that we are out of time, and super grateful that we have this setup where there will be you know, a second part to this episode, people are going to be able to listen to this conversation and generate kind of critical responses and continue to engage with some of the threads that you all have offered tonight. So maybe very kind of briefly, because we know we can continue this conversation. What are the pieces, if there was a takeaway or an implication for either community psychology or really just community engaged research or community engaged driven knowledge creation, like what are the the implications for this kind of work for other people who resonate with what you all are kind of offering to us today, so that we can think about this work differently going forward in a lot of the spaces that that exists to community engaged research ?

Ruth Nyaruot Ruach 1:09:24

I guess for me, my kind of take on this is just really, and going back to just kind of that relationship building is that when- and what I think is so unique about our relationship, not only with, you know, the institution of Victoria University, but also with you know, with Chris and Rama and Sam and Roshani, is really just about like, I think what made our relationship I guess, strong in a sense and ongoing is really just offering that space of understanding that academic knowledge is not really the only offering that exists. It's really having that space of cultural knowledge and ancestral knowledge is really also a very impactful, I guess, tool that a lot of people, I guess, look away. And I think a lot of the times with, you know, community engagement, that is, you know, there's obviously that scarcity mindset of not engaging with institutions, because essentially, that's where exploitation happens, where all of that information is sourced, and you don't know how it's used. So to work closely with Rama with his PhD, I guess, it was really important for us to, you know, hold spaces where we can just like, have conversations and just like, dive into our consciousness and the way that we think and offer that, you know, cultural knowledge and culture experience to really, I guess, shape and structure, our experience. And I guess a lot of the times I always tell myself, academic knowledge is not the only knowledge available.

Sam Keast 1:10:57

I might just bounce a little bit off that, because I'm thinking perhaps in terms of this podcast, and the what we're trying to do in this global sense of, and if we're thinking about this, and like Ruth has so eloquently said that these are epistemic communities, these are communities of Knowers. And so what is our job in elevating those people as Knowers, those communities as Knowers of repowering them, or empowering whichever way you think about it. So I think that is the takeaway for for community psychology for us locally, but also perhaps in a more global sense. And as said earlier, you know, this is the thing, how do we, as tellers of stories, the writers of and knowers of our lives, their stories need to go beyond the dominant ones that are told about us, need to push back against, resist those other narratives about these communities. I think that's the real goal of these, however rich, the importance of these kinds of projects.

Geskeva Komba 1:12:13

Yeah, to add to that. Yeah, lived experience is epitome of expertise. Like you can't get much more than that, like you have lived experience in terms of community, and just how you experience a particular culture. Like there's, there's no other expertise that can actually trump that, you know, in terms of how you need to think through research and if it's seen or done in another light, then it just becomes extractive, you know. And so it's really important that when we look at research, and we will look at engaging community, that lived experience is seen as an expertise in how you want to capture, you know, story or perspective.

Rama 1:13:18

To jump in, as well and add to that, you know, I think something Ruth that when we were speaking once, and you were talking about, you know, in colliding people's stories for the zine and the importance of care for people's stories, and trading people's stories, with that respect and care for how they're used, and having a real thinking around that process. And I think absolutely, that goes the same for research and doing this kind of work as well, and documenting other folks' stories or, you know, the work that you're doing and having care for that story and thinking about how, the ways that it gets used and yeah, really, really respecting that. So I think that's such an important thing as well.

Natalie Kivell 1:14:05

This has been an incredible conversation. I know I am desperately hoping to continue it and hope to be able to continue to like, see the knowledge products that are coming out of the thinking and the work, whether those are films and art base pieces and academic publications, radio shows. And we've heard so many, I have taken so many notes. We've heard so many things across this idea of like, you know, ancestral knowledge is a resistance to academic knowledge. And the ways that, you know, we can't really pinpoint what our everyday practices look like because they are so messy and complex and relational and human. And I think that what you have offered to us is something that a lot of us are going to be able to kind of play with and engage with and see what that means for everyday practice. And so I'm very grateful for this conversation across time zones. And I want to thank you all for joining us for this conversation as one step in kind of a broader conversation.